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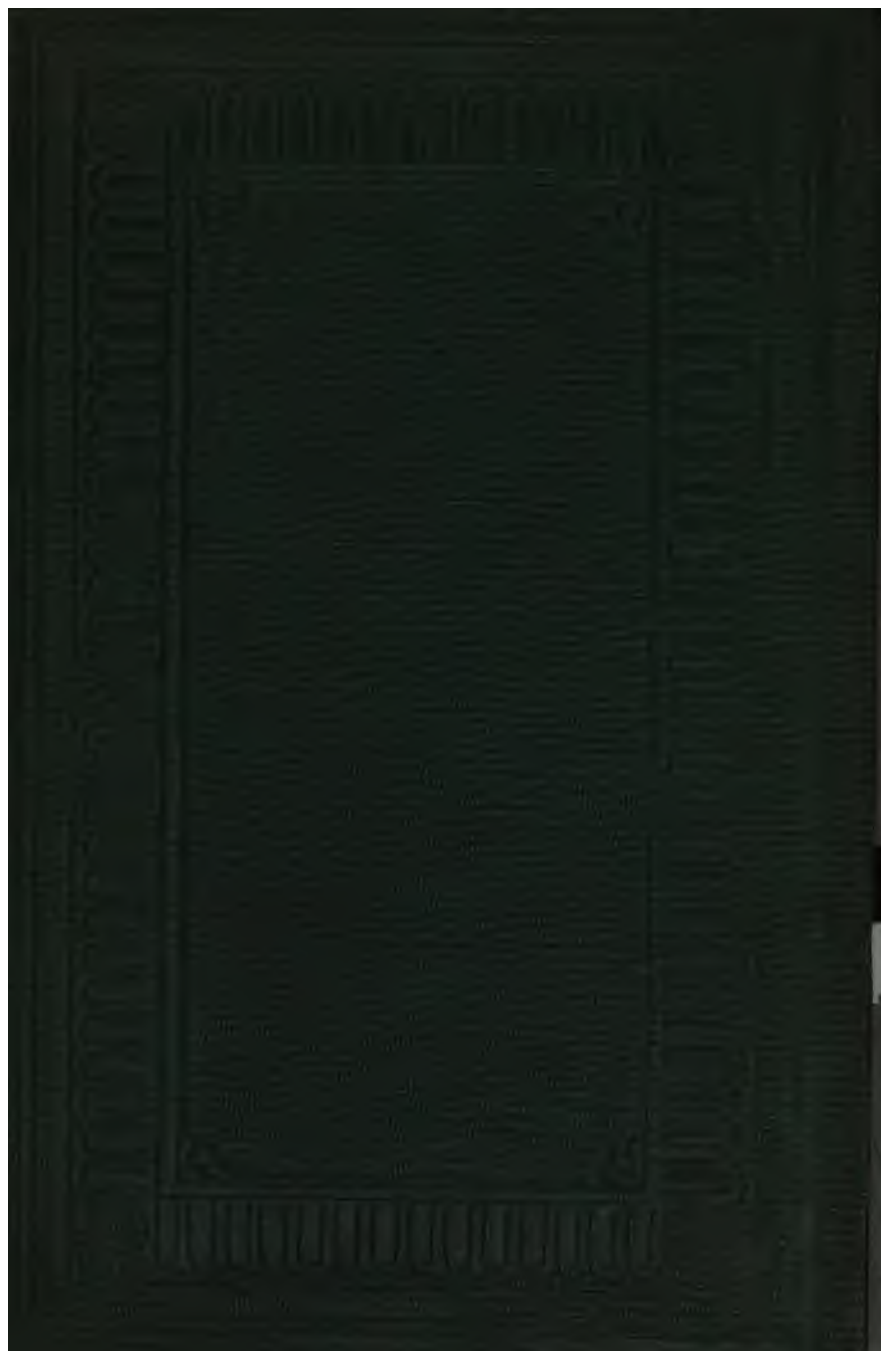
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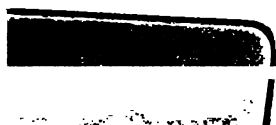
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THE  
MESSAGE OF CHRISTIANITY:

*A Book for the Busy.*

By WILLIAM LANDELS,  
MINISTER OF REGENT'S PARK CHAPEL.

Second Edition.



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## PREFACE.

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FOR the busy, many of whom are said to cherish an aversion to Christianity, because of its supposed hostility to their temporal interests, and, consequently, to the happiness of life, this little book is especially intended.

Believing that such a supposition could only be induced by distorted representations of Christianity, the author has sought to supply an antidote by exhibiting Christianity as it is.

Feeling assured that its nature furnishes the most convincing evidence of its Divine origin, and that we best secure its reception, when, by a faithful exposition, we give it an opportunity of commending itself, he has attempted to expound, in a general

and popular manner, such as seemed best adapted to the class whom he has more particularly in view—the peculiar creed of Christianity, its precepts; the representation it gives of, and the change it proposes to effect in, man's spiritual condition; its influence on his earthly life; and its final reward.

How imperfect his exposition is, no one can feel more than himself. Powers such as he cannot pretend to would have failed to do justice to the subject, within the limits to which he was confined. And, though his exposition had been much more extended and minute, it must still have come far short of perfection; since it is not more impossible to paint the sun, than for any human representation of Christianity to do justice to the beauty of the original.

Still it is due to himself to say, that he has endeavoured to render the representation accurate so far as it extends. To the best of his ability, while restricted by the conditions which he felt it necessary to observe, he has portrayed Christianity to others, as it appears to himself. He is not conscious of having attempted to soften any of its features,

for the purpose of rendering it less repulsive to human prejudice and depravity. If he has dwelt at greater length on the more pleasing parts of its teaching, the less pleasing have not been lost sight of. This representation is, at least, free from the defects of some, which seek to commend Christianity to the unbelieving by denuding it of its peculiar features; and, with all its imperfections, he is convinced that its candid perusal will not fail to produce, on the mind of the reader, an impression favourable to its subject. To his candour, and to the Divine blessing, the writer now commends his humble effort, thankful for the degree to which it has already proved an instrument of good, and praying that now it may be rendered more extensively useful.



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THE  
MESSAGE OF CHRISTIANITY.

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CHAPTER 'I.

*What Christianity requires you to believe.*

Is there not something strange in the statement which now we so frequently hear, that those who are most actively engaged in the battle of life — those who constitute, in fact, the very sinews of society, have a special aversion to Christianity? Is it not altogether a surprising statement? "Surely," one feels constrained to say, "there must be mistake somewhere. Either such aversion does not exist, or Christianity is not its object; but some counterfeit of Christianity—something which they have confounded with Christianity, because bearing its name." So confident is the writer of this, that he makes this appeal to the

busy, requesting them to consider the message of Christianity—its doctrines and precepts, its description of humanity, its proposed regeneration of humanity, its present influence and its future reward, without any fear that their verdict will be other than he could wish.

He is convinced that, while Christianity is adapted to every class, and better adapted to each than any scheme of man's devising, though intended for it exclusively, it has special recommendations for those whose lot it is to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Its Founder, as a man, belonged to this class. Men of this class were the first who espoused his cause. He mingled with the lowest ranks. The cottage of a humble family was his favourite place of resort. He was *anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. The common people heard him gladly.* It was from this class the first ministers of his kingdom were drawn. Galilean peasants, hard-handed, weather-beaten sons of toil, were the first who published his message among the nations; and, as might be supposed, it was by men of the same class, in every nation, that their message was first received. Christianity as they expounded it was the friend of man as such. It paid no respect to persons. It asserted the essential equality of all men. It stretched out its hand to raise the down-trodden, and it lifted up its

voice on behalf of the oppressed. The slave heard it and felt himself a man. The humblest work became sacred in the estimation of the worker, when he heard how the Mightiest had humbled himself to the meanest condition, how *He* would reckon the work, however lowly, as performed for his own sake, how it was a God-given task, which, if faithfully performed, he would graciously reward. Christianity elevated his work into a worship—made him feel that, inasmuch as he was God's servant, the employment of a king, or the errand of an archangel, was not more honourable than his. And while it so favourably influenced his mind, it gradually improved his condition by claiming for him common rights ; asserting the dignity of his nature and the grandeur of his destiny; making him appear, not as the drudge of others, but as the freed-man of Christ—not as a toiling machine, soon to be worn out and worthless, but as destined to survive the wreck of all material things, and to inherit the ages of eternity. And it must be strangely altered therefore (albeit it professes to be unchangeable), it must be widely different from what it was, if it be inimical to the interests of this class now—if there be *anything* in it fitted to excite their peculiar aversion.

But Christianity has not changed. It is the same now as it has ever been. Spurious and corrupted forms of it may exist ; it may have its counterfeits, as

all good things have ; but these are not Christianity. The only Christianity of which we know anything, is that of which the type is found in the New Testament. Any system so called which does not accord with the pattern presented there, is unworthy of the name. Not to such systems do we solicit your attention, not to the Christianity of the Churches, but to the Christianity of Christ. And sure we are that, whether you consider what it requires you to believe, or what it requires you to do, or what it says you are, or what it proposes to make you, or what it will do for you now, or how it promises to reward you in future, you will find no reason for rejecting it as untrue, or unworthy of your acceptance.

The subject to which we now request your attention is, *What Christianity requires you to believe*. But why should you concern yourselves about what it requires you to believe? Infidels tell you it is of small consequence what you believe, and those who call themselves Secularists, and free-thinkers of all shades, unite in telling you it is of small consequence what you believe ; and they quarrel with Christianity because it suspends salvation on belief. But let me ask, do these parties believe what they say? If so, why are they so constantly saying it? Why are they at such pains to propagate their sentiments, but be-

cause they wish others to believe as they believe? And why do they wish for that, but because they know, notwithstanding their denial, that a man's belief exerts a most important influence on his feelings and character?

And does not your own experience tell you that it is so? Do you not feel glad or sad according to the nature of the report which you believe? Are you not roused into anger or soothed into a state of grateful emotion, as you believe in the cruelty or the kindness of others. Do you not trust or distrust, as you believe or disbelieve their professions of friendship? Or, will it be pretended that there is no difference between truth and error in their influence on the mind? Is it all the same whether you believe the truth or believe a lie? Will it be said, in this age of the world, that truth is worthless as chaff, and not to be preferred to falsehood? Is it not rather the food of the mind, while error is its poison? Do they not affect it beneficially or injuriously as food and poison the body; and by as much as the mind is greater than the body, require us to be more careful of what we believe than of what we eat?

Then it should be remembered that truth and error increase in importance, and that the belief of them influences the mind more powerfully, in proportion to the greatness of the object to which they relate. If

your belief relates to anything so insignificant as the life of an insect, it is of small consequence whether it be true or false; it becomes a widely different thing, however, when it relates to your own nature and state; and it is more important still when it relates to the Divine Being. Even of yourself, you cannot believe what is true without profiting by it, nor can you believe what is untrue without suffering more or less; but you profit far more when you believe what is true concerning God, and you suffer far more when you believe what is false.

Now Christianity, if it be what it professes, is a revelation of God. It tells you what is true of his character, of his feelings towards you, of the provision he has made for your happiness, and of his willingness to receive you; and no wonder, therefore, if belief so influences the mind; no wonder that it says, *He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.*

We say, no wonder that it tells you this. It would be a miracle if it were not so. Your ruin is as naturally the fruit of your unbelief, as the harvest is the fruit of the seed which you have sown. The connexion between the two is as intimate and as sure as the connexion between sowing and reaping. The effect is precisely that which, in the nature of things, you might expect from such a cause. If your belief

be such, that you live only for the present world, it is certain that you are making no provision for another. If it leads you to live without God now, you cannot be qualifying yourselves for the enjoyment of his presence hereafter. And when you enter into another world, for which you are unprepared, unqualified for dwelling in the presence of your Maker, and having left behind you the means of gratifying the propensities and passions which you now indulge, so that these must prey upon yourselves and torment you with their incessant cravings;—how is it possible that your condition can be otherwise than wretched? O, notwithstanding all that Secularists and others may say, it is a solemn truth which the Bible utters, *He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting!*

We do not include in what Christianity requires you to believe, those truths which men, without its help, have discovered or conjectured; but confine ourselves to such as it alone reveals. Without Christianity men believe, for example, in the being of God; and accordingly, it does not formally tell you that God exists, but assumes the fact and your belief in it

That is a belief for which you are not dependent on any revelation. It is one of the primary beliefs of your nature. It rises spontaneously in your minds as you look on the wondrous works which surround you. It obtains throughout every land, and in every mind, except those that are specially degraded, having lost nearly every trait which distinguishes the man from the brute. The Atheist attempts to deny it, but cannot to his own satisfaction; and now and again it asserts its existence, as when, in moments of danger, he instinctively prays for protection which no earthly arm can afford, and in moments of suffering calls to an unseen Being for relief.

So is it with a future state. Men, without Christianity, may not be sure of its existence, but they have an instinctive impression that it does exist. Hence the heaven and the hell, which, under various names, heathen nations have imagined. And hence your own inability, when a loved one dies, to think of her as existing no more; or to conceive of yourselves as having ceased to be.

Nor is it otherwise with the fact and demerit of sin. This, too, is a universal belief. All men are more or less conscious of wrong doing, and apprehensive of punishment. The heathen believes it; and hence his animal and sometimes human sacrifices. The infidel believes it; and hence the misgiving with

which he regards the future, and the dread and the despair which sometimes render his death-bed a scene of horror, when the man who appeared so bold and brave when danger was distant, now that death stares him in the face, weeps like a woman, and begs for mercy like a child. You all believe it; and hence your impression when you see a monster of wickedness unvisited by any judgment here—your impression that in another world there must be vengeance in store for him; and hence, too, your feeling of uneasiness in prospect of your own death. You may object, perhaps, to the punishment which the Bible threatens, thinking it greater than you deserve; still you believe, though in spite of yourselves, that there is punishment. And as regards the fault you find with the Bible, it may be suggested that you would see less reason for objecting did you try to understand its meaning, instead of quarrelling with it because it presents in figurative language, that which many could not understand, or would not regard, were it literally described; and, moreover, it should be remembered that the culprit is not in the best position for judging impartially of the punishment which he deserves.

Now, all these are beliefs which exist independently of Christianity, and for which it is not responsible; nor is anything in them, which may appear to you objectionable, to be laid to its charge.

Christianity is properly a remedial scheme, designed to save you from a condition, on account of which the beliefs we have mentioned necessarily wrap the mind in gloom. You believe in the fact of sin, and your consequent liability to suffering; and Christianity comes to tell you of deliverance from sin's desert. You believe in the being of a God, and you are apprehensive of his wrath; and Christianity comes to tell you how his favour may be enjoyed. You believe in the existence of immortality, and you fear it may be an immortality of woe; and Christianity comes to tell you how it may become an immortality of glory. And, surely, nothing more should be required to commend it to your candid consideration! O, remember, you do not escape from any disagreeable belief by disregarding Christianity! You dislike to believe in the being of God, perhaps; but you believe that without Christianity, and you must believe it whether you reject Christianity or not. The truth is written in the very core of your nature, and you cannot blot it out. After all that sceptics may do to persuade you to the contrary, and after all that you can do yourselves, you will be haunted with the consciousness that there is a God with whom you have to do. Your belief in the fact of sin is disagreeable; but neither do you rid yourselves of that by rejecting Christianity. Though you disregard its message, your

sense of guilt will remain, and acquire strength when danger threatens, and eternity seems nigh at hand. It gives you pain to believe in a future state, but you do not help yourself by rejecting Christianity. However you may treat its message, though you act as if there were no such thing in existence, you still know that there is a hell, which, as sinners, you deserve to endure. All these beliefs are inevitable whether Christianity be received or rejected. And he who persuades you to disregard its message, is doing what he can to keep you in a state in which these inevitable beliefs cannot fail to terrify and torment you ; whereas Christianity, by the communication of its truths, would so change your condition that these inevitable beliefs would become not only consistent with, but conducive to, your present and eternal welfare.

The message by which Christianity seeks to effect this change in your condition, cannot be presented in briefer compass than by quoting that charming epitome of the gospel which has gladdened so many hearts, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The truths which it requires you to believe, are all intimately connected with the person of Christ. It directs attention to his person, first of all, and requires some degree of acquaintance with that as an essential preliminary to the

understanding of the truths which centre in him. And how beautiful and how wonderful is the portrait of his person which the history presents! There is no one to equal it either for its subject, or its execution, in all the long list of biographies which the world contains. Examine the mythologies of ancient nations; read the brief accounts which have been handed down to us of the philosophers of olden times; investigate the character of those heroes whose deeds have been renowned in song or chronicled in story; and you will find no one who is worthy even to unloose the shoe-latchet of Jesus of Nazareth, as portrayed by the fishermen of Galilee. He speaks as never man spake; and he acts as never man acted. With all the feelings of a man, he has none of his imperfections. The senses, the natural wants, the physical infirmities of a man are combined with the perfections of a God. Look at the portrait, and while you feel its essential humanity, you are constrained to acknowledge its superhuman excellence. What dignity is enthroned on that brow! What benevolence beams in that eye! What wisdom flows from those lips! What rectitude attends his steps! What wonders are wrought by his hands! How tender he is when tenderness is becoming! How severe when severity is required! How majestic; yet how condescending! Possessed of all knowledge; yet simple as a child.

So powerful, that disease disappears at his touch, the dead rise at his bidding, the elements of nature are submissive to his command; and yet so gentle, that he does *not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; a bruised reed he does not break, nor quench the smoking flax.* To the poor he is kind; and faithful to the rich. With sorrow he never fails to sympathise, and is always terrible to sin. While he pardons the penitent, and exalts the lowly, and makes the mourner glad; pollution shrinks from his glance, pride is abashed in his presence, hypocrisy writhes under his rebuke, and selfishness blushes when confronted with his benevolence. Prejudice can find no fault with his character; lynx-eyed criticism suggest no improvement. Scenes there are in his life which humanity will never forget. "Men still wonder at the *gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,* and persist in saying, *Never man spake like this man.* The brightness of the brightest names pales and wanes before the radiance which shines from the person of Christ. The scenes at the tomb of Lazarus, at the gate of Nain, in the happy family at Bethany, in the 'upper room,' where he instituted the beautiful feast which should for ever consecrate his memory, and where he bequeathed to his disciples the legacy of his love; the scenes in the garden of Gethsemane, on the summit of Calvary, and at the sepulchre; the

sweet remembrance of the patience with which he bore wrong, the gentleness with which he rebuked it, and the love with which he forgave it; the thousand acts of benign condescension by which he well-earned for himself, from self-righteous pride and censorious hypocrisy, the name of the *friend of publicans and sinners*;—these, and a hundred things more which crowd those concise memorials of love and sorrow with such prodigality of beauty and of pathos, will still continue to charm and attract the soul of humanity, and on these the highest genius, as well as the humblest mediocrity, will love to dwell. These things lisp in infancy loves to hear on its mother's knees, and over them, age, with its gray locks, bends in devoutest reverence." \* Infidelity, charmed with the excellence which they display, forgets her incredulity for the moment, and acknowledges that the fabrication of such a story is more difficult to believe than its truth; and, surprised into an outburst of admiration, declares that, while the greatest of heathen philosophers "lived and died like a sage, the son of Mary lived and died like a God."†

It is not unadvisedly, or in any inferior sense, that we speak of Christ as Divine. According to the testimony of his disciples, he laid claim to absolute Divinity. He existed before he appeared as a man. *He*

\* Rogers.

† Rousseau.

*was in the beginning with God, and was God. His own profession accorded with the apostles words, He being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Nor was his profession unsustained by corresponding action. He established his claim to divinity by healing all manner of diseases, opening the eyes of the blind, restoring the dead to life, controlling the winds of heaven and the waves of the sea; and, after his death, by rising from the sepulchre which his enemies had carefully sealed and set a watch over; and, finally, by his ascension into heaven, when, in presence of his wondering followers, he rose on high until a cloud received him from their sight.*

Such is the person in whom Christianity requires you to believe. We have dwelt on his history at such length that, perceiving its lovely traits, you might be attracted to its attentive perusal. It is only by leading you to a knowledge of Christ that we can hope greatly to profit you. An acquaintance with him is the foundation of Christian belief. Trust in, and affection for him, are the true Christian feelings. To enjoy him is the highest Christian privilege. To

become like him is the end of Christian life. They are not the friends but the worst foes of Christianity who, bearing its name, asperse his character or derogate from the glory of his person. Talk of a Christianity without Christ!—a Christianity which has no definite views of the person of Christ!—a Christianity which is accommodating enough to admit of his being believed in as a God, or regarded as a mere man!—a Christianity which treats the facts of his life as fables, criticises his teaching and finds fault with his character!—a Christianity which repudiates the Christ of history and out of the alembic of criticism brings forth a Christ of its own creation!—a Christianity to which Christ is of no consequence, into which he may be received, or from which rejected, as best accords with the opinions or the caprice of its friends!—of all the inconsistencies in this inconsistent world, I know none to equal that. Tell me of a summer without a sun; of an astronomy without a star; a philosophy without a regard for truth; of a religion or a theology which recognises no God;—and none of them can be more absurd than a Christianity without Christ!

A scriptural belief in his person is essential to salvation. With your sense of guilt, with your dread of the future, with your painful apprehensions of God's wrath, if you may not believe that such an one as the

Christ of the New Testament has appeared on your behalf, that God has sent him as your Helper, if you may not thus take hold of this strong Deliverer, there is no hope for you. You cannot rid yourselves of the fact of guilt. You cannot merit future happiness. You cannot climb to the enjoyment of the Divine Being. The uneasiness which now you feel must continue and deepen into anguish as your condition is more vividly realised—anguish which, in a future state, will be unmitigated by the sources of enjoyment to which you have access now. But if you believe that such an one has appeared, that your God to become your Helper has assumed your nature, that you have a Deliverer who, by his sufferings, expiates your sins; who, by his merits, procures for you an immortality of glory; who, taking hold of your affections and gathering them around himself, can raise you into union with your offended God; there is hope for you then. You may rise above your fears then. You may be delivered from present uneasiness and from future anguish then. Your sense of guilt may cease to be a source of pain; your dread of the future be converted into joyful anticipation; and your apprehension of God's wrath give place to the enjoyment of his favour. O, it is a blessed belief! Alas! that any should shrink from it as inimical to happiness. How could the notion ever enter your minds that it

interferes with the duties, or sheds a gloom over the enjoyments of life? What! to believe that God was so interested in your welfare that he condescended to assume your nature? to see the Eternal “embodied in human form, to hear him speak in tones of compassion, to behold him wandering among men, as their brother and friend, to look upon him as he dies for the guilty, to see him *face to face*, to feel the warm breath of his boundless love stirring the responding affections of our hearts,” to see him on our behalf vanquishing death and bursting the barriers of the tomb, to think of him controlling the destinies of the universe, as our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, with a sympathy which extends to our minutest sorrows, and a power which is greater than all our wants;—this belief inimical to happiness!—likely to interfere with the enjoyments of life! Ah! is it not enough rather to fill the soul with rapture? Might it not prove a source of overwhelming joy? How fitted to raise us above ourselves!—to make us feel and act and suffer nobly! How fitted, by making us conscious of the dignity of our nature and the grandeur of our relation, to render us superior to the influence of earthly trials, and to beget in us hopes and aspirations after a glory greater than eye hath seen or ear heard of, and such as it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive!



But what reason have you to entertain this belief? Just as much, yea more than you have for believing in any well authenticated history. The evangelical historians were eye-witnesses of the facts which they record. They were perfectly qualified to record them accurately. They had no inducement to publish such statements unless they knew them to be true. Their testimony was borne in view of confiscation, and imprisonment, and torture, and death. It was published, and it spread among a people in whose time and in whose presence the facts which it records are said to have taken place, and who must have known it to be false if it were so—a people who had every reason and every opportunity for contradicting it; and yet its statements were never challenged, but its truth tacitly acknowledged, even when its circulation was most dreaded and opposed. To disbelieve such a testimony is not to exercise the candour which requires evidence in order to conviction; but to display the gross incredulity on which evidence is thrown away.

Let us, before we close, refer you shortly to one or two of the more prominent truths connected with the person of Christ, which Christianity requires you to believe. It presents the Saviour's history as the manifestation of God's love to you. *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent*

*his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Thus it measures God's love to you by the gift of his Son. Not that such language as understood by you fitly describes its extent, but because it gives you the best idea which you are capable of receiving. His feelings in giving Christ to die most resemble, of all things earthly—all things which come within the range of your knowledge, the feelings with which a parent would part with a beloved child; and the love which would lead such a parent to give his child to die for another, best represents the love which led God to give his Son to die for you. That would be the strongest proof of love which a parent could give; he would rather die himself than give his child to die. And the strongest proof of love which God could give was sending his Son into the world that you might live through him. Hence, in accordance with this view, we find the Apostle saying, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* The love which has given us Christ, what will it not give? It has granted us the greatest gift, and how can it withhold the less?

And this is that Christianity which some would

lead you to regard with suspicion, as a respecer of persons; to shun and abhor as the enemy of your class. They have painted it in hideous colours, and you have shrunk from it as from a loathsome thing; and yet it comes to assure you of the friendship of the greatest of Beings—that Being who made the universe and all that it contains, and who holds your lives in his hands. It tells you that his arms are stretched out to embrace you; that there is room for you in his heart; that you may lean your head on his bosom; that you may take refuge under the shadow of his wings. It tells you that you are all the objects of his love; for that love embraces the world. And withal, it is a love so great that it will withhold nothing which your welfare requires—a love which in the greatest gift has already furnished you with the pledge of every other—a love which has never ceased to follow you with its manifestations—a love which has surrounded you with the bounties and beauties of nature, causing the fields to yield their abundance for you, and the trees their fruit; spreading the flowers at your feet, and stretching out over you the azure sky; sending you the sunshine and the rain, and the refreshing breeze; providing for you the quiet retreat, where, severed from the turmoil of business, your weary soul may repose like a child on its mother's lap, while gentle influences come stealing over you, and soothing

melodies lull your cares to sleep. And though you sometimes have to suffer, even in the suffering which it sends, it has respect to your welfare; by suffering it would lead you to the cultivation of nobler traits of character; it would purge you from the dross of base passion that is in you; it would give you gentle intimation of the displeasure with which it regards your sin, and deter you from its commission; it would impede your progress in, and turn you from the path that leads to perdition, that thus you may be saved from the more awful suffering in which, if your impenitence and rebellion be persisted in, you cannot fail—in spite of all that love has done for your salvation—to land yourself at last.

Again, Christianity points you to the sufferings of the death of Christ as an expiation or propitiation for your sins. We do not attempt any theological explanation of these terms. We read in Scripture that *he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.* And from all these statements we gather the truth that your sins may be justly forgiven. They present no hindrance to your salvation. You are as welcome to your Maker's friendship

as if you had never sinned. Heaven is open to receive you. The Saviour has procured for you a title to, and the Spirit is ready to produce in you a meetness for, its enjoyment; while the Father, through his appointed way, invites you to enter there. Through Christ, and in his name, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins*. In him God has presented to you the gift of eternal life.

Such is a brief representation—very imperfect, it must be confessed, of what Christianity requires you to believe. Other truths it no doubt contains; but these are the most prominent, they are what may be called its essential truths. The belief of these, not only as involving the belief of others, but because of what it is in itself, constitutes men Christians; it is the commencement of Christian life. And what is there in such a belief to excite your enmity? Why should you treat it as if it were hostile to your interests? What is there about it that you should regard it with suspicion, or shrink from it as an accursed thing? It wears no frown; it utters no curse. It breathes only words of blessing. It looks on you with a benignant eye. Its only wish is your welfare. Is not its very nature sufficient to commend it to your acceptance? Does it not stand out in immeasurable superiority to every other, casting them all into the shade by its matchless excellence? Ah! treat it how

you will, never will the world have such another belief! In all the religions which men have framed, in all the theories they have devised, in all the truths they have discovered, there is nothing to compare with this. Heathen philosophers caught but a dim reflection of it. Its superiority to all their dogmas, stamps it with the impress of Divinity. Men could not have devised such truths. As when the sun shines no argument is required to prove its existence, so when the excellence of this belief is contemplated, argument is not required to prove it Divine. Treat it how you will, it is a belief which will never be erased from the heart of humanity. It is too precious to be suffered to die. It will be handed down from sire to son, throughout all generations; and neighbour will publish it to neighbour until it spreads the world over. Much as you dislike and shun it, it exerts a most blessed influence even on the lowliest life. It lights the cottages of the poor with a peace and contentment, which in its absence are unknown in the palaces of the great. When affliction visits them, it proves, throughout the long nights of their watching and sorrow, a light amidst the darkness. When borne down by the pressure of calamity, it is a stay to the sinking heart. "The poor man waking up from the dream of life" clings to this belief, "and his eye grows bright, he is not afraid to stand alone, to tread the path un-

known and distant, to take the death-angel by the hand, and bid farewell to wife, and babes, and home." And wouldest thou only receive it, son of toil as thou art, with hard hand, perhaps, and bent frame, and furrowed brow, it would give a grandeur to thy life; making thee feel that thou art God's worker; teaching thee to expect for thy lowliest labour a higher reward than thine earthly wages; making thee one of God's nobles, a son of God, the heir of all the ages and of all the worlds. Then thou shouldest tread the earth with nobler step as the footstool of thy Father, look up to the starry heavens as thy Father's palace and thy future home, cheerfully perform thy allotted task, and thankfully partake of thy homely fare, knowing that but a little while and thou shalt wing thy flight from thy present environments into a loftier sphere, when every work thou hast well done, and every burden thou hast faithfully borne, will augment thy rapture, as thou engagest in the unceasing service and the ever ascending pursuits of an endless life.

## CHAPTER II.

## What Christianity requires you to do.

CHRISTIANITY is a practice as well as a creed. It has rules of life as well as articles of belief. It has not only a message to be credited, but a work to be done. It attaches importance to truth because of its inherent worth, exhorts us to *buy the truth and sell it not*, blames us if we are not *valiant for the truth in the earth*; but it also employs truth as a mean of moulding character. In leading us to believe what is true, it seeks to make us do what is right; and tells us plainly, that *faith without works is dead*.

It has been shewn, in the preceding chapter, that there is nothing repulsive, or inimical to happiness, in what Christianity requires you to believe; and we trust the present will shew, not less clearly, that there is nothing unreasonable, or hostile to your interests, in what it requires you to do.

We wish at the outset to disabuse your minds of

the impression that Christianity requires you to relinquish every pleasure. We feel assured, that whatever its requirements may be, that is not one of them. Many, we fear, have imbibed the notion that it is a melancholy thing—a thing which frowns on the most innocent recreations—a thing which, chasing away all joy from their life, would convert it into a prolonged season of sadness. And, perhaps, this notion has received some countenance from the conduct of its professed friends. There are popular representations of religion, which invest it with an air of gloom. A tone of sadness, rather than of joy, pervades many of our sermons. Asceticism is frequently confounded with piety. The religion of the healthy and the hearty is suspected by many. The more a man denies himself the innocent enjoyments of life, and shuns every thing fitted to improve the taste, or regale the imagination, the more religious, in certain circles, he is thought to be. We admit all this. But we contend that such conduct is not Christianity, but a gross caricature of Christianity. *Its* object is not to lessen but to increase our pleasures. It would deprive us of no enjoyment which is not succeeded by sorrow—no pleasure which does not end in pain. Men have yet to discover the Christian precept which frowns on the pleasures of friendship, or even of innocent conviviality—conviviality, that is to say, which is not in-

jurious to your physical, or mental, or moral nature. It is no enemy to such recreation as becomes a man. The family does not exist which has had its enjoyments diminished, or deteriorated, by the enthronement of Christian principle, or the awakening of Christian feeling, in the hearts of its members. Your mutual attachments it will sanctify, without spoiling them of their charms. It places no interdict on the gratification to be derived from the exercise of your intellectual powers; but leaves you at perfect liberty to investigate every source of knowledge. And whether you wish to improve your hours of leisure, in following Astronomy along her "star-paved way"—or in reading the wondrous history which Geology has inscribed on her rocky records—or in gazing with curious, or gratified eye on the profusion of beauty which Botany spreads at your feet—or wish Poetry to bear you upward on the wing of its lofty thought, and to charm you with its harmonious numbers, as you peruse the books which are "the precious life-blood of master spirits, embalmed and treasured up in order to a life beyond life"—or whatever other field of knowledge you may wish to explore;—Christianity not only grants you full permission, but will accompany you in your course, cheering you by her countenance, and assisting you with her light, plying you with motives to diligence, under the influence of which,

other things being equal, you will outstrip all your competitors in the pursuit of knowledge. And thus does it afford scope for all the energies of your nature, bringing them all into play, and by providing for, and inciting to, their vigorous and harmonious exercise, rendering them sources of pleasure in themselves, or channels through which the mind drinks in the enjoyment which surrounding objects afford.

We talk of the restraints of religion; but I know of no restraint of which the judgment, when calmly exercised, does not approve. The Infidel may have more liberty than I have; but his is a liberty which I would not and dare not covet. He has liberty to degrade and destroy his own nature—liberty to sink himself into a mere brute—liberty to blast his intellect, and wither his affections, and make his reputation bankrupt. He has liberty to gratify his bestial appetites without fear of retribution—to let his passions run riot in unholy indulgence, sacrificing to their gratification the most sacred ties which unite man to man, until, the marriage relation dissolved, the endeared name of family forgotten, men herd together like beasts of the field, and the ruin of society has become as complete as the wreck he has made of himself. Such liberty he has. His principles present no obstacle to the pursuit of such a course. He may do all that and be a consistent Infidel. In that re-

spect he possesses the utmost freedom—a freedom which I cannot claim—and a freedom, let me say, which I am content to want—a freedom with which, as I do not ask it for myself, I would not curse another. And if this be all of which Christianity deprives me, if it subject me to no restraint, except that it says, *Do thyself and others no harm*—and I know of no other—it is a slanderous falsehood to speak of it as requiring men to forego, in any degree, the innocent pleasures of life.

And as Christianity would not diminish your pleasures, it does not require you to neglect your daily employment. Secularists, who form themselves into societies for the purpose of securing the good of the present world, by excluding all thought of another, speak of it as unfavourable to industry. You hear the same thing said by others who are not Secularists in name, and oftener assumed than said. Among many it passes current for truth; and the consequence is, that Christianity is regarded with suspicion as the enemy of their social interests. With all this, however, we fearlessly challenge any one to point to an age or country, which, in the absence of Christianity, attained to a degree of industrial prosperity at all to be compared with that which Christianity has produced. Is it not a marvellous thing—if this system

be the enemy of progress—that progress should be almost confined to the nations in which it obtains, and that the rate and extent of progress should correspond so closely with the influence it exerts?—being invariably greatest where it has risen to the most commanding position, and its influence is most extensively and powerfully felt. The tribes that inhabit the continent of Africa have had no reason to complain of Christianity obstructing their progress; and yet we are not aware that their secular condition is greatly superior to ours. And should it be objected that these are not fair specimens of unchristianised nations, we take the most civilised that can be found—the Chinese, or the Hindu, or the Mohammedan; and again we say, we have yet to learn that their secular affairs are more prosperous than our own. It is not among them, in as far as we are aware, that Art culminates in perfection, or Science multiplies its discoveries, or Industry erects its monuments, or Commerce amasses its wealth. It is not there that men build their tubular bridges of enormous magnitude; or construct the railroad to bind together, as in a network of iron, the inhabitants of distant provinces; or collect exhibitions of the industry of all nations. And though such structures as the Pyramids of Egypt may excite the wonder of the traveller, they are not the product of willing industry, but of toil wrung

by oppression from the bones and sinews of slaves; and, existing for no useful purpose, they are monuments to the degradation of the many and the tyranny of the few; nor are they worthy to be named with the wonderful products of uncompulsory labour, which are the glory of our country, and our age.

It is a spurious Christianity which is inimical to industry. Popery, with its monastic orders, and priestly power, is undeniably so; and there may be forms of Protestantism which are not altogether free from the charge; but it can never be brought against a system which presents such a collection of industrial maxims as the book of Proverbs—a system which tells its subjects that *if a man will not work, neither should he eat, and that he who provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel*. In accordance with these maxims, Christianity makes men *diligent in business*, while they are *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*. It does not teach that piety is to be fostered by shrinking from the active duties of life. It frowns on the cowardice which skulks into solitude. It cannot tolerate idleness. Even though the salvation of the soul be the object, it will not permit men selfishly to confine their attention to themselves, while they depend on the industry of others. It is not the religion of the sighing sentimentalist, nor of the lazy

anchorite, but of the manly worker. It does not teach a man to shirk duty that he may escape danger, but sends him into the front of the hottest battle of life, where the shafts fly thickest, and the onset is most furious, that he may fight manfully and well, with stout heart and strong arm cleave his way through difficulties, and pluck the crown of success "even from the spear-proof crest of rugged danger." It does not say, "Flee, and escape danger—shun your foes;" but "Do, and conquer them." It has far less to commend it to the lazy lolling idler, than to the brave-hearted youth who resolves to acquire distinction on the arena of life, where the head that wisely conceives, and the hand that promptly executes, and the heart that boldly dares, seldom fail of success. The stirring stanzas of the poet are in perfect harmony with its genius and its spirit:—

" Not enjoyment and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Find us further than to-day.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouac of life,  
Be not like dumb driven cattle!  
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no future, howe'er pleasant!  
Let the dead past bury its dead!  
Act—act in the living present!  
Heart within and God o'erhead!"

But there are other enjoyments than those of which you now partake, other good than that which may be seen—the meat and drink, and other tangible possessions which are the great end of your daily toil. There are pleasures to be enjoyed in a future state, and good which you cannot see; and Christianity requires that those future pleasures and that unseen good should occupy a share of your attention, and that your efforts should be directed toward their attainment. You are not to live here always. There is another world into which you must pass ere long. And if your actions relate only to this, if you concern yourselves only about this, if you seek only its pleasures and possessions, you can possess nothing in another. It would be folly to expect a harvest where you have sown no seed, to look for interest where you have deposited no capital, to hope for wages where you have performed no labour; and if the present world absorb all your thoughts and commands all your energies, how can you hope for an inheritance in the world that is to come?

And yet that world concerns you most. The period of your sojourn here is but a small space on the scale of your existence. It is there you must find your home. This life is but the first step in your course through endless ages. Though stretched to the utmost limits allotted to man, how little it seems when

compared with the coming eternity! Think how many generations, all as eager and as busy as our own, have been swallowed up of time, and there remains no wreck of them any more. And think how soon you must follow. What a small matter it is to them now, how they fared, or what they possessed here; and what a small matter it will be to you a hundred years hence! When that aching head and those toiling hands are crumbling in the dust, with what feelings will you look back on the present life? Many are gone, and many are going, to whom it will appear, in the retrospect, as a feverish dream, of which they cannot think but with horror; alas! not a dream but a dreadful reality as regards its painful results; but a dream—a dream of madness as regards the erroneous estimate which was formed of the world, and the eagerness with which it was pursued—a wilful waking dream—a dream in which the sleeper thought himself safe, though treading the verge of a precipice and from which he was only aroused by his fall—a dream in which he followed the guidance of a disordered fancy, when his position required the most deliberate exercise of the judgment—a dream in which he snatched at a worthless bauble that perished in his grasp, and then awoke to discover that he had lost the opportunity of securing an inestimable treasure!

And while, from that stand-point, the present will appear to you so insignificant, what will the future seem? O, my brother, thou art the heir of countless ages! The vastness of thy duration surpasses the comprehension of a finite mind. Thought cannot set a bound to thy future existence. We think of the time when the world with which thou art now engrossed shall have grown hoary with age—when its framework shall be broken and its elements dissolved—when *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise*—when the light of the last sun shall become darkness;—thou shalt be living then! Thou shalt be only in the infancy of thy being then! Thou shalt be looking forward to numberless ages then! We may carry our thoughts still further into the future, and still the same statement will apply. We can never reach a point from which the end of thy life can be seen. We may cast our thoughts forward until the mind becomes bewildered, and returns exhausted from its adventurous flight; and immeasurably beyond the distant point at which vision fails us, the current of thy being flows! Thou shalt inhabit some part of God's universe, retaining thy consciousness and identity, for ever. In this sense thou shalt never die. All coming events shall take place in thy lifetime. Thou shalt survive the epochs which mark the ages of the future. Thou shalt live—nor can language or thought rise

higher than this—thou shalt live as long as God Himself.

Christianity tells you all this; and the testimony of Christianity accords with your own instincts. While you are indebted to it for positive information, the thought originates with yourself. You have an impression that it is so, irrespectively of Christianity, and an impression of which you cannot rid yourself. And when you have such a prospect before you, does Christianity ask anything unreasonable when it requires you to make preparation for it? Were it the case that you could not provide for that without neglecting your earthly concerns, still wisdom would dictate that the provision should be made. If it were impossible to attend to the claims of both worlds, if it were impossible to make the best of both; better sacrifice the present to the future, than the future to the present. It were not less than madness to forego, for the comforts of a moment, the enjoyments of a period which you cannot measure; nor is it less a manifestation of madness if the future is neglected when, as we have seen, its good might be secured, without any want of attention to the concerns of the present life.

We cannot insist too much on the truth that you may secure your happiness in another state of existence without neglecting your temporal affairs. It will not make you worse tradesmen if you sometimes

reckon on the ultimate results of your conduct. You are not better husbands, or better fathers, or better neighbours, or better workmen, now that you think only of the present, than you would be did you sometimes contemplate your future destiny. It were easy to mention the names of men, who commenced life in similar circumstances, and without any superior advantages, to others ; differing from them only in that they never forgot their responsibility to God, or lost sight of the future world, or neglected to make the engagements of time subordinate to the interests of eternity ; and who—I shall not say, notwithstanding that difference, but, on account of that difference—have behaved so discreetly, and laboured so diligently, and planned so prudently, that, in the acquisition of wealth and social status they have outstripped all competitors. And so it might be in every case. Were you duly impressed with the importance of eternity, you would only be the better qualified for engaging successfully in the pursuits of time. And what is it then, but the most reckless improvidence, what but the most thoughtless folly, to be so engrossed with the transitory present as to make no provision for the unending future ?

You recognise the importance of forethought in relation to the present world. You think little of his wisdom—you think of him with feelings not higher

than contempt, who, in forming a contract, or engaging in an undertaking, or preparing a plan, thinks only of present advantage, and takes no account of the future. You deem him a fool who, like the brute, lives only in the present hour, and does not reckon on the remoter results as well as the immediate consequences of his actions. And surely, my brother, you are still more foolish—inasmuch as eternity is infinitely more important than time—you are still more foolish, if you neglect or refuse to make that preparation for the future which Christianity commends and enjoins.

It is but slightly varying the illustration of the subject when we say, that Christianity requires you to cultivate the better part of your nature. You have a body, and you care for it. You provide for its wants, and attend to the state of its health, and promote its comfort, and exercise its various faculties; and right it is that you should. Any man who would censure you on that account, knows nothing of Christianity. He who miraculously fed the hungry, and healed the sick, and opened the eyes of the blind, cannot be conceived of as frowning on bodily comfort, or establishing a system which is inimical to its promotion. But while Christianity admits of legitimate attention to your bodily wants, it requires you to remember that you are not all body. There is a something within you which is but little affected by

your physical condition; which the nutriment of your body does not nourish; whose strength does not increase with your physical strength, and which is frequently unaffected by your physical weakness; which exists in its entirety when the physical frame is mutilated; which acts when the physical frame is incapable of action, and will continue to exist when the physical frame is dissolved—a something which thinks, and feels, and hopes, and fears, and loves, and hates—a something which points instinctively to the future, yearning after, and believing in, an endless existence. As you look on the ghastly form from which life has but recently departed, your impression is not that that lump of loathsome matter, on which corruption is already doing its work, is the friend with whom so lately you held loving converse. You call that his corpse. Of himself, you say significantly, as you mention the fact of his death, “He is gone.” The tenement is there but the living inhabitant has taken his departure. As you look around on a company of men and women, you recoil from the thought—at least I do, and cannot entertain it for a moment—Are these merely so many pieces of organised matter? Is there nothing in them that survives the stroke of death? Is that thing which time withers, or disease destroys, which death blanches, which we bury in the ground to conceal its loathsomeness, on

which the worm preys, which feeds the rank grass and is exhaled on the passing breeze—is that thing the man? Some of us have laid our friends in the grave, and some have laid their children there;—is it as true that their being has been extinguished, as that their body now moulders in the dust? Is it a mistake to speak of them as ours still, as existing in some other region, and to indulge the hope of meeting them again? Is all that remains of them a little dust—which is not them—has nothing by which we can identify it with them—and must that too be scattered and all trace of their existence blotted out for evermore? You cannot honestly entertain such a belief as that. The very child that climbs your knee and clasps your neck, though he can scarcely lisp your name, would rebuke you if you did. He will not speak of his deceased mother, or his deceased sister, or playmate, as if they did not exist. He will scarcely believe in his own death, and after you have done your utmost to convince him of the fact, he retains the impression that something within him—that he, the child, shall live after the event which you so designate.

Now, being thus unable to rid yourselves of a belief in the soul's existence, what Christianity requires you to do is, that you should attend to the interests of this higher part of your nature, that you should seek to

rid it of the elements of evil which are in it; to secure its present safety; to improve its faculties by exercises congenial to their nature; and to make provision for its future happiness. Instead of thinking only of the body, and toiling perpetually to support, and pamper, and decorate, that which must so soon perish, it requires you to give to the soul that amount of attention which its vast importance demands. Instead of always asking, What shall I eat? and what shall I drink? and wherewithal shall I be clothed? How shall I decorate the body? How shall I gratify my fleshly appetites?—It would have you ask, How shall I improve this immortal mind? How fit it for its flight through endless ages? How raise it to the lofty pursuits of which it is capable? How develop and expand its wonderful powers? How qualify it for the contemplation, adoration, and enjoyment of the Divine perfections?—These are the questions which Christianity would have you consider; and it also proposes for your adoption a course of conduct by which these ends may be realised.

And is there anything unreasonable in this requirement? Unreasonable? Ah, me! Speak I to men who, though their frames are bent and hardened by toil, were nevertheless created in God's image—who, though their hands are so busily engaged with this world, are possessed of undying souls?—and need I

tell them what a degradation it is, what an act of violence to their better nature, when that soul is uncared for, when its wonderful faculties are permitted to lie dormant, entombed in the body as in a living grave! Ah, me! to think of such a soul being made to grind like a blinded Samson at the wheel of your sensual pleasures—when it has a wing scarcely inferior to the seraph's in strength, and might yet prove capable of a flight as high! To think of its being confined to the duties of the workshop, seldom rising above the question, What wages can I earn?—when the boundless universe is its proper field of discovery, and does not afford it a too ample range! To think of its being made the drudge of the body, knowing no better employment than to pamper its lusts—when it could make the highest world its footstool, and while suns and systems roll in all their grandeur at its feet, could levy tribute from them all! The degradation of such a soul can neither be described nor imagined. In vain do we look around us to find, or exercise the imagination to conceive of, anything that will adequately illustrate its extent. I have thought of the eagle, which, soaring above the range of human vision, gazes with unfaltering eye on the splendour of the noonday sun and basks in his golden beams—I have thought of the degradation of the noble bird when chained to a stone in the dungeon wall; I have

thought of an angel smitten with insanity, its noble intellect deranged, leaving the heaven where in its youth it soared and sang, to find employment in heaping together the dust of the earth; I have thought too of the king reduced to the condition of the beggar; and thus have I attempted to picture by comparison that most deplorable calamity—the waste, the destruction of a human soul. But I have tried in vain. Its degradation cannot be described by any illustration which the universe can furnish, or the imagination create. Our lamentations indicate what we cannot measure nor describe, *How are the mighty fallen! How has the gold become dim; and the most fine gold changed!*

But I must pass on to observe further, that Christianity requires that you should not live for yourselves only, but that you should pay a proper regard to the interests of other beings to whom you are related.

It has been shewn that you believe, whether willingly or not, in the existence of God. Your own nature testifies that there is a God above you, from whom you have sprung, on whom you depend, to whom you are responsible, and before whom you must appear. And the requirement of Christianity is, that you should love him supremely, and employ your faculties of body and mind in accordance with his

revealed will, and for the fulfilment of his purposes. Its first and great commandment is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.* And while it requires you to cherish this supreme regard, it gives directions for its proper manifestation, in the cultivation of a character resembling his, in the performance of acts of obedience, and in observing the various exercises of worship.

The reasonableness of this requirement cannot be disputed. Prove that God does not exist, and you rid yourselves of the obligation to love him,—not otherwise. If he exists, he is entitled to your profoundest homage. If he made you, he has a right to demand the employment, in his service, of all your faculties. If he is the source of all blessing, from whose hand come the bounties by which your wants are supplied and your life preserved; who has prepared for your temporary dwelling-place this beautiful world, where provision is made for the gratification of every sense; where you may find entertainment freely provided for you, infinitely superior to aught that it requires wealth to purchase—entertainment which you may enjoy as you walk abroad in the fields, and gaze on the azure or the starry vault, while a thousand sounds harmoniously blended are wafted to your ear, and ten thousand flowers diffuse their incense around;

—if he is the source of all these blessings, then his works indicate qualities of character, and his manifold gifts are the results of a goodness, which render him worthy of your supreme affection.

Nor does this requirement of Christianity appeal to your sense of right alone. It is not more your obligation, than it is your interest, to love God supremely. The soul cannot find rest without some object of supreme attachment. It will wander about dissatisfied for ever, unless it have some being around which its affections may cluster, and in whom it may find repose. And this object of supreme attachment, in order to its meeting the wants of your nature, must not be liable to variation, lest it should disappoint you; it must be exempt from imperfection, that your higher nature may not upbraid you for the unworthiness of your choice; its excellence must surpass finite comprehension, that in your ceaseless march of improvement it may be still above you, beckoning you onward, and that, while it does not disappoint you by change, it may not become uninteresting by sameness, as a book whose lessons you have learned, or as an often told tale. But all these qualities are to be found only in one Being—in that God whose perfections are infinite. And accordingly it is every where found, that without God men cannot enjoy happiness. They may seek to satisfy themselves with earthly good, but the restless-

ness of the soul, amid all that the world can supply, attests its craving for something higher, and is, in fact, her instinctive, unarticulated prayer, "Give me God, give me God; for without him I pine, I die!"

Thus your duty and your interest combine to enforce this requirement of Christianity. You cannot disregard it without violating your sense of right. You cannot disregard it without injuring your own soul. In this as in other things Christianity, when it speaks most sternly, is most studiously mindful of your highest interests. And happy will it be for you if this exposition of her message should lead you into a state of reconciliation to your Maker—if, listening to her requirements, you make a surrender of your heart to God, consecrating your being to his service, and living in such habitual fellowship with him that your every work will be an act of worship—your whole life a ceaseless psalm of praise.

Passing by without remark, what it requires you to do in relation to your neighbours—a requirement which also commends itself to every sound judgment, being neither more nor less than that you should *love your neighbours as yourselves, and do unto others as ye would have others do unto you*—passing this by without remark, we have simply to add, as the summing up of the whole, that, while the requirements of Christianity

do not interfere with due attention to the affairs of this life, your compliance with them affords you the only security that your life will not prove a failure.

Our Secularist friends assert that if there be a future life, attention to the affairs of the present is all that is necessary to secure its enjoyment. But were they consistent with themselves, did they but apply a principle which pervades all their teaching, they could hardly fail to perceive the fallacy of their assertion. For why are they so desirous of propagating their peculiar dogmas? Why, but because it is a principle with them, as it is with others, that men must adapt their efforts to their object, and because Christianity, in their estimation, so interferes with secular duties as to present a hindrance to secular prosperity?

Now, though we must demur to their conception of Christianity, we cannot deny the correctness of their principle. But if their principle be correct, what becomes of the assertion, that attention to the affairs of the present life is enough to ensure the enjoyment of the future? The probability is, to say the least, that our mode of existence there will differ widely from our mode of existence here. And the conclusion is inevitable, therefore, that if, as they recommend, we give exclusive attention to this world, we shall have no aptitude for the engagements of the next; and may anticipate the misery which must ensue from being

ushered into a state of existence for which our habits have rendered us totally unfit. Thus, whatever may be the influence of Secularism on *the life that now is*, it has no promise of the life *which is to come*. And, unfortunately, its promise in relation to the present life not unfrequently fails. However strictly its disciples follow its rules, they may fail to acquire wealth, and to realise even ordinary success; and, when death summons them from this world, they may be haunted with the bitter reflection, that though they have sought it thus in vain, yet as the consequence of allowing it to engross their attention, they have lost the opportunity of preparing for another, and must now enter a world where all is strange, of which they have taken no thought, and for which they have made no provision. And how bitter must that reflection be!—To lie on your death-bed, and feel that after all your toil your life has been a failure, that circumstances have baffled you, that you have been worsted in the battle of life, that the past is a scene of disappointment and wretchedness, and the future a dreary blank—a region of darkness into which you are compelled, however reluctantly, to pass; and passing into which, you go you know not where, to become you know not what; but in which you cannot reasonably hope for happiness, having confined your desires and efforts exclusively to the world that has passed away.

It should commend Christianity to your adoption that it prevents such a waste of time and energy. It does not ensure success in the pursuit of worldly good ; but it affords you a guarantee that, though you should miss success in this, your life will not prove a failure. To the Christian man, that is not the object of life. Even in his worldly avocation he aims at something higher. He toils here that he may reap yonder. His religion converts the activities of the present into a discipline for the future. The duties of this life are steps in the ladder by which he climbs to the enjoyment of another. His struggles against adversity increase his nobleness. The faithful discharge of duty in the sphere in which God has placed him, though fruitless as regards his temporal position, serves to foster, and strengthen, and develop that character on which the honours of heaven are conferred. As the flower yields its fragrance most abundantly under pressure ; as the discharge of the thunder-cloud purifies the atmosphere, and brightens the face of the sky ; as the fire severs the dross from the gold ; and the burnishing of the lapidary gives brilliancy to the gem ; so our painful toil, though fruitless here, gives prominence to some of the loveliest and noblest traits of character, rendering it more illustrious for the trials through which it has passed. All my diligence may not enrich me. I may not achieve what the

world calls success. Men who look only to the present may pronounce my life a failure. But my labour, though disappointing as regards its immediate results, is not in vain. The disappointment exercises those graces of patience, and meekness, and long-suffering, and resignation, and fortitude, which give loveliness to the life, and which, transported into a fairer region, distil that fragrance with which God is well-pleased, and fill the mind with that unspeakable peace which renders them, in the estimation of their possessor, their own abundant reward. If I have no other fruit of my toil, I shall have this at least—and it is recompense enough—I shall hear the Master say, *Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

## CHAPTER III.

*What Christianity says you are.*

IN previous chapters it has been shewn, that Christianity is conducive to your happiness, in what it requires you to believe, and consonant with your judgment, in what it requires you to do. In the present, our object is to convince you that your own hearts echo its description of your state.

In attempting this, however, we have an ulterior purpose. When you find it impossible to deny that you are what it says you are, we may hope that you will be prepared to inquire, whether you should not comply with its overtures—whether you can find a better remedy for your condition than that which it proposes. Moreover, when you see how accurate is its description of your state, you may be led to the conclusion that its Author must have been more than man, to be able to describe so perfectly what is in man. It may happen to you as it has to others, that, seeing such an exact picture of yourselves, you will

tremble in the presence of that Being to whom your most secret thoughts are so well known, and gladly seek his friendship, from whose sight you cannot escape.

And what does Christianity say you are?—What is the representation which it gives of your character and condition? If you go to the Bible for an answer to this question, you can hardly fail to be struck with the remarkable air of honesty which pervades its statements. It does not flatter you as they do who wish to gain your approval, or as it would be likely to do were it a system cunningly devised for obtaining, as extensively as possible, the suffrages of mankind. The picture which it gives is so little gratifying to your pride, that we could not conceive of its giving such a picture, if, to gain your favour, it sought to please rather than to profit you.

Its descriptions are widely different from those which you frequently find in the pages of the novel. Beautiful representations are given there of imaginary characters, who are painted to the author's liking, and conducted through various scenes and adventures, until landed in a second paradise, where they are so happy in the cultivation of their virtuous principles, and in the reciprocal exercise of their pure affections, that angels might almost look down with envy on the scene. The account which the Bible gives differs

widely from these; and you know that the Bible is right. You are too well aware that the novelist does not paint *your* character—that, in so far as *your* experience goes, his description is a lie. Nor have you ever met, in actual life, with such men as he describes. You have looked for them, but without success; nor can you, after long enough trial, hope to find them. The character he has drawn exists only in his own imagination. His portrait is as false as it is fair. Humanity, as you see it, is not the faultless and beautiful thing which, in his favourite specimens, it is made to appear; but a thing which, though bearing traces of nobility, is now sadly marred, and in which loathsomeness and beauty are strangely mingled.

But while the description of Christianity is not so flattering as the picture of the novelist, it does not say that every part of your character is bad. Some of its friends have represented it as doing so, I confess, and it may be, that, knowing their representation to be untrue, and that you were not so bad as it made you appear, you have spurned it from you, and, confounding it with Christianity, have extended your indignation to that as well. It is to be regretted that Christianity should thus suffer from the mistakes of its friends; for, assuredly, it gives no countenance to the representation of which you complain. It denies to you the possession of absolute goodness—goodness

which meets the requirements of the Divine law, and merits the Divine favour. It teaches that, living without God, your best actions are tainted by being performed while you are in a sinful condition; but does not deny that they may possess a degree of goodness. It does not charge you with sin in loving your wife, or in caring for your children. . It acknowledges the goodness of the feeling which prompts you to rescue from danger, and relieve distress. It recognises in some the existence, though in a somewhat obscured and distorted form, of sincerity, and candour, and honesty, and honour, and generosity; and finds something to love in those who have not yet complied with its claims, and who fail under its test. Strictly confining itself within the limits of truth, even when it most severely censures—recognising the greatness which remains in you, even when lamenting your fall—nothing can surpass the representations which it gives of the dignity of your nature: only its representations, unlike those of the novelist, are not such as to make you feel self-satisfied and proud of what you are, but such as, while they overwhelm you with a sense of your possible grandeur, humble you as you think of the contrast which it presents to your actual state.

We say you cannot have a higher conception of the greatness of your nature and its capabilities, than the Bible gives. As described there, man is intimately

allied to the Divine Being. He was made in the image of God. He is possessed of intellectual powers which render him greater than the material universe; for while that universe knows nothing, he is capable of acquiring a knowledge of himself, of the universe, and its Maker. He is destined to survive the wreck of material things, and to live throughout endless ages. He has a moral sense by which he is capable of discerning between good and evil; freedom to choose between the two; an instinctive appreciation of right and abhorrence of wrong. He is capable of loving and enjoying God; feels in some degree his need of God; and now and again, on joyful, or melancholy, or thoughtful occasions, in seasons of helplessness or distress, is powerfully drawn God-ward. Such is the account which the Bible gives of the capabilities of your nature.

But, alas! the very loftiness of its representation only renders the more heinous, by contrast, the delinquencies with which it charges you. The more elevated the position for which you were intended, the more fearful has been your fall. So much superior in endowments to material things, you do not so well fulfil the purpose of your being. Destined to live for ever, your desires and aspirations are confined to the present life. Possessed of a moral sense, you have so perverted it—so allowed your inclination to blind and

bias your judgment—that not unfrequently you call evil good, and good evil. With liberty to choose, with your better self approving of the right and condemning the wrong, you have yet allowed the lower part of your nature to tyrannise over the higher—the voice of passion to drown the voice of conscience—and thus have preferred the wrong to the right, and deliberately acted a part which your better nature condemns. Capable of loving and enjoying God, your affections are centred on yourself, and you seek your portion in the world. Feeling your need of God, and at times drawn toward him, you nevertheless shrink away from him, and regard him with feelings of terror and aversion. You are a being in which strange contradictions meet. You are, as a mighty thinker has expressed it, “the glory and scandal of the universe.” Nor is there any explanation of the problem which your nature, in itself, and as described by the Bible, presents, except that which the Bible itself supplies, when it declares that *God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions*—that created in the image of God he has fallen from his first estate—that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. The one emphatic sentence in which we may sum up its description of your state—a sentence which explains all that it says of your delinquencies, and derives force from all that it says of your greatness—a sentence which

condemns you the more, the more dignified your nature and capabilities—a sentence which, did you perceive its full import, while constrained to admit its truth, could hardly fail to awaken the most powerful emotions of terror and remorse—is contained in the few simple, but dark and dreadful words—words of terrible significance although so easily uttered—**YOU ARE SINNERS!**

This is what Christianity says you are. And remember, that though, as many do, you may turn indignantly from its statement, you do not thereby prove it false. It is much easier, let me tell you, to treat it with contempt—to close your ears against it—than honestly to satisfy yourselves that it is untrue. It finds an echo in the depths of your own nature; and having once heard it, though you may never more open God's Word, though you may never more listen to the voice of a preacher, there is an inward monitor from which you cannot escape, whose voice will now and again make itself heard, and that monitor will testify that when Christianity said you were sinners, it only charged you with what is undeniably true.

If you are not sinners, what is the meaning of all the suffering which surrounds you? However you may treat Christianity, you cannot deny that there is a fearful amount of misery in the world. Look where

you may, that fact stares you in the face. Your own heart, in all probability, has been wrung with anguish; bereavement has shed a gloom over your own fireside; your body has been the seat of excruciating pain. Or, if you have mercifully escaped, you have often witnessed it in your neighbours. You have heard their bitter cries; you have been moved to tears by the recital of their sufferings. You cannot walk the streets without meeting with the form which has been wasted by disease; in many an eye you see misery's piteous look; and in many a countenance do you read the tale of woe which is too legibly written there. Nor can you escape from its presence, travel where you will. No local cause accounts for it. By no accident or oversight is it exclusively produced. It exists wherever humanity is found. It attends us from our birth to our death. And that death—is it not appalling to most men? Are not its attendant circumstances most repulsive to nature? Is it not in itself the king of terrors?

Now, how is all this misery to be accounted for? In the midst of it all, it is not difficult to perceive traces of God's goodness; but how is it that a good God should visit his creatures with such suffering? How is it that he does not exempt our bodies from disease, and place us in a world where nature would invariably smile upon us, and all her processes contribute to our

enjoyment, without even the occasional infliction of pain? How is it that he does not exempt us from death, or render death less terrible than it is? How is this to be explained, if it be not true, as Christianity tells you, that men are sinners? In this, and in this only, do you find the key that unlocks the mystery. Admit this, and all becomes plain. That mingled goodness and severity—those marks of displeasure combined with manifestations of love, are just what might be expected from a good God towards sinful creatures, with whom he is displeased, though he loves them still.

But if you admit the sinfulness of man, you cannot deny your own sinfulness. You cannot shift the blame from yourselves to your fellows. And should you attempt to say, "Others have sinned, but not I;" others would use the same plea in their turn; and thus all would be found guilty, according to the testimony of all. Each would criminate his neighbour, while he excused himself; and his unwillingness to confess his own guilt would only be an evidence and an aggravation of the guilt which he denied.

Again, if you are not a sinner, whence your dissatisfaction with yourself, and your fear of the future? Whence that schism in your own nature?—that wish to do what is never done?—that conviction of the judgment that you ought to be better, to which your

inclination is so opposed, that, instead of being better, you are worse? How is it that your actual is so inferior to your ideal?—that you know so much better than you do? How is it that you cannot with entire self-approval review the deeds of the past? Your feeling of dissatisfaction is comparatively slight, perhaps. The bustle of business and the whirl of pleasure serve to drown the voice of conscience. The want of reflection keeps you in a great measure insensible of your state. But the feeling is there, notwithstanding. In your thoughtful hours it increases in strength; when danger threatens it fills you with alarm, and deepens into something like despair when death stares you in the face. How is this to be accounted for? You call it superstition; and attribute it to the influence of Christianity. It is the consequence, you say, of having sometimes heard its teaching, and being trained amid its influences; and is to be struggled against as a pernicious and enslaving feeling, gendered by contact with a false system. But the wonder is, how Christianity could produce this feeling so generally, if there be no reason for it. Men hate Christianity just because of its tendency to make them dissatisfied with themselves: how is it, then, that whether they receive it or not, they yield to the feeling which excites their hatred? How is it, but just because they know, notwithstanding their dislike, that the feeling is founded

in truth? Moreover, the feeling exists where Christianity cannot account for its existence. It is to be found among heathen nations who have never heard the message of Christianity, and are ignorant of her name. They, too, are dissatisfied and restless, because conscious of wrong-doing; and are attempting to find rest for themselves, and to atone for their misdeeds, by the sacrifices which they offer to their imaginary gods.

But nothing need be said to press home this charge, if you have a proper conception of what sin is. When Christianity says you are a sinner, it does not mean that you are a liar, or a thief, or an adulterer, in the ordinary sense of these terms. If it did, you would be able, in all probability, to refute the charge. You know that you are honest and truthful, a good husband, a good father, and a good neighbour; and the statement of Christianity, in such a case, therefore, could not be applicable to you. But that is not what Christianity means. It does not charge you with robbing your neighbours, or deceiving your neighbours, or in any way injuring your neighbours—you may have done that or you may not—but what it tells you is, that you have not rendered unto God his due—that while he requires you to love, you have not loved him—that while he requires you to serve, you have not served him. You have lived *without God in the world*.

You cannot deny that his requirements are reasonable, or that non-compliance with them is sin. The parent, you acknowledge, is entitled to the love of the child for whom he has toiled and cared, for whose sake he has spent laborious days and sleepless nights; and you denounce the child who, on arriving at maturity, is so ungrateful as to forget his parent, holding no intercourse with him and taking no notice of his existence—you denounce him as a very monster of ingratitude. And when I remind you how you have received God's bounties without thanking him—how he has supplied your wants, and you have cherished no gratitude and acknowledged no obligation—how he has blessed you, and you have rendered him no return, your hands have done him no service, your heart offered no adoration, your lips uttered no praise—how you have lived and moved and had your being in him, and he has not been in all your thoughts, or if you have thought of him at all it has been with feelings of aversion, and as speedily as possible have dismissed him from your mind—how, though he has watched over you with an eye that has never slumbered, and protected you with an arm that has never wearied, and loved you with a heart that has never grown cold, you have *despised the riches of his goodness, and longsuffering, and forbearance, not knowing that his goodness was designed to lead you to*

*repentance*; and have perverted his gifts into occasions of continued forgetfulness, and employed the faculties with which he has endowed you without reference to his will—how, though during many long years he has befriended you by night and by day, you have never uttered his name but in blasphemy—how language of profanity has often escaped your lips, and feelings of enmity to God and goodness have lurked in your heart—when I remind you of all this, I need not press the charge which Christianity makes, when it says you are a sinner; for however much you may deny it in words, there is within you a witness which inaudibly, but not the less surely, testifies, *thou art the man*.

But sin involves punishment. And the representation of Christianity is, that you are in the position of a criminal who has been found guilty, and is awaiting the infliction of the penalty which the law awards to his crime. Observe, Christianity is not the author of the punishment of which it tells you. You quarrel with it because of that part of its message, and reject it as if you thereby escaped the doom which it predicts. But Christianity does not bring, nor inflict the punishment. It only tells you of its coming. You are exposed to it irrespectively of Christianity. You are exposed to it now. And the object of Christianity is to make you acquainted

with the fact, to give you some conception of its awful character, to provide and propose a way of escape, to warn you that, if you neglect that, there is no other, and that, consequently, the punishment must be endured to the uttermost. What it teaches is, not simply that you will be condemned if you reject its overtures; but that you are *condemned already*, and that, in case of that rejection, *the wrath of God abideth on you*. Refusing to avail yourself of the only way of escape, there is no other alternative but that you should reap the fruit of what you have sown, and realise, in your experience, how fearful is that wrath with which the Almighty visits sin.

Very awful are the descriptions of punishment which the Bible contains. I cannot refer to them but with a burdened heart; and would gladly shrink from the task. But some of them were uttered by that gentle One who wept over the woes of humanity, and sympathised with all its sorrows; and no man must assume to be more merciful than he was. It is in mercy, indeed, that the Bible presents those descriptions; deeming it better, infinitely better, that it should be described for the sinner's warning, than that he should remain ignorant of its nature until the moment of its infliction. We read of *snakes, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest*; of *the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched*; of the

*blackness of darkness; of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.* Much of this language is confessedly figurative; but it means something. There is no bombast in God's book. It does not clothe small thoughts in pompous words; nor does it employ strong figures to represent trifling realities. There may be no fire and no worm—we believe there is none—but assuredly there is something which these fitly represent.

Nay, turn not away, as if this were too harsh and terrible to be true. I fear it is the half-consciousness of its truth that makes you quarrel with it so. Were you sure of its being untrue, the mention of it would not so much annoy you. You would hear it with that dignified composure which flows from the consciousness of superior knowledge. You become angry over it just as men do over an unwelcome truth which they wish to forget—their anger being proportioned to the strength of their suspicion, that that which is unpleasant is nevertheless true.

You speak of it as unreasonable; but you will have difficulty in satisfying yourself that it is so. You see nothing unreasonable in punishment when it does not concern yourself. You deem it both reasonable and righteous that the magistrate should punish. It is necessary to the maintenance of law and to the welfare of society that he should. When you meet with a monster of wickedness, who has brutally injured others

—such a man, for example, as Legree, in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”—when you see him after all his crimes escaping retribution in this life, you assent to his punishment in the next; nay, you demand it. Your sense of justice is violated, your moral nature receives a shock at the very thought of his being permitted to escape. Your groundless belief that death is the end of man’s troubles, and that all are happy afterwards, does not extend to him. But may not the principle which you recognise in his case apply to your own? If you feel that he ought to be punished for his great offences, is it not possible, my brother, that you will be punished, though less severely, for your smaller offences? According to your own sense of right, is there not reason in the Scripture doctrine that *God will render to every man according to his works*? You see the offences of such a character as we have named, you can appreciate them because of the injury which they inflict on man; and you think little of your own because they are offences against God. But surely, it is no light matter to have robbed God of the use of all your faculties, to have perverted all his gifts into occasions of rebellion, to have lived as the enemy of your Almighty Benefactor, and in that state of enmity to pass into his presence! And if your sense of right tells you that offences against man may and ought to be punished, how can reason

possibly teach that such offences against God must or shall be permitted to pass with impunity? *I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say.*

Is it not enough to make you anticipate the punishment which Christianity predicts, that no law of nature can be violated without consequences ensuing, which are more or less painful? If you violate the law of gravitation, bruises, dislocations, fractured limbs, or death, according to the extent of the violation, follow as the penalty. If you interfere with the proper exercise of your organic functions, ill health is the result. If you decompose a portion of your body by fire, you suffer excruciating pain. The presence of the smallest quantity of foreign matter in some parts of your system, will drive you almost to madness. And inasmuch as our moral nature is superior to our physical, it is reasonable to infer that its laws are guarded by superior sanctions, and that a severer suffering will follow the infringement of the one than the other. Oh, depend upon it, there can be no sin without suffering! If anything may be learned from analogy it is, that, if the sinful acts of your life have not yet been followed by their penalty, that penalty is still to come. Every sin has added to the wrath which awaits you; and when the sins of a lifetime are taken into account, who can form a conception of what that wrath will be? They *may* be cancelled

by grace. Through the merits of the Saviour's work they *may be removed far from you as the east is distant from the west*; and thus may you escape their merited punishment; but if found on you at last, if unrepented of and unforgiven, God will reckon with you for them all. The smallest will not escape his notice, nor will you escape its desert. It will be an ingredient in the cup of woe which you are doomed to drink. Oh, my brother, despise not the statement because it is so unwelcome! Be assured it is far easier to take offence at it, than it is to disprove it. You may say it is repugnant to your feelings, and that, consequently, you cannot receive it; but it exists as a truth still. You might as well object to the law of gravitation, because you cannot throw yourself from an eminence without being bruised and broken by your fall; or quarrel with the fire because you cannot thrust your hand into it with impunity. Your displeasure would be as reasonable in the one case as in the other, nor would it prove less effectual in exempting you from the consequences of your rash act. After all you could say, the fall would still bruise, and the fire would still burn; and after all your objections it still remains true, that you cannot indulge in sin without exposing yourself to suffering.

See ye not how certain sins bring ruinous consequences even in the present life. The spendthrift

soon reduces himself to beggary and starvation, and, as the penalty of his folly, feels the pinchings of hunger and nakedness. The debauchee sows the seeds of disease in his frame, and permanently destroys his health as the result of his temporary indulgence. The drunkard wastes his property, makes a wreck of his body, clouds his mind, ruins his family, and involves himself in mental horrors too awful for description, by the course which he pursues. You never think of quarrelling with the Divine arrangement which attaches such consequences to such conduct. You do not pronounce it a harsh law which ordains that those who sin thus should suffer thus. And may not the same arrangement extend to the future world? May not the sins against God, which are to a great degree unaccompanied by suffering here,—may not their consequences stretch into the vast hereafter?

But not only does reason accord with the statement of Scripture; when the nature of sin is taken into account, reason itself shews that punishment is inevitable. Let it be considered that the sinner is contending with his Maker—that his will comes into collision with the will of the Almighty. God claims to be supreme; it is essential to the welfare of the universe that he should be supreme; but the sinner seeks to make himself supreme. Thus he places him-

self in a position of antagonism to his Creator, and acts a part at variance with the interests of the universe. And what can possibly be the result of such a strife?—what but the ruin and the wretchedness of the man? The wheels of the universe will roll on in spite of his impotent will; and if he place himself in their way, he must be crushed by them. God will not be thwarted in his purposes by the opposition of the sinner; and he who will not bend to them must be broken by them. He has power enough to secure their fulfilment in spite of the hindrances of his creatures. That Hand that made the worlds, in which they all lie like grains of sand, could crush them into non-existence as easily as it beckoned them into being. He holds in his hands the elements of nature; he controls the unseen influences that touch the soul of man. In his power are all the faculties whose exercise affords you pleasure, and in a moment he could render them all the instruments of pain. He has but to will it, and through every part of your sensitive being you will feel excruciating pangs. Oh, the suffering is not only inevitable, but as awful as it is sure! For the soul of man to do battle with its Creator—what is that but to *kick against the pricks*? To lie helplessly beneath the Almighty's frown—what figure can be too strong to describe such a state?

• You dislike to hear of the undying worm and the un-

quenchable fire, but is it less awful to bring down on yourselves—as your sin cannot fail to do—the indications and effects of the Divine displeasure?

Then it should be remembered that sin itself is misery. It not only brings punishment, it is punishment in itself. Its influence in this life is greatly neutralised because of the various objects by which the attention of the mind is diverted from its own state; and because of the gratification which, from external sources, is ministered to various parts of our nature. But when the sinner is removed from those diverting objects, when these sources have ceased to yield gratification, as will be the case in the future world, the mind will become sensible of its sorrows, and the evil of sin will be felt in all its bitterness. A disordered nature, the different parts of which clash with each other; the judgment upbraiding the passions, and the passions leading captive the judgment; indulgence which yields no pleasure, but is attended by unavailing remorse, and remorse prompting to increased indulgence, by which that remorse is again strengthened; God absent as regards his gracious manifestations, present as regards the manifestations of his displeasure; dreaded and yet hated:—Ah! there is enough in that to constitute a hell. That is the undying worm and the fire which is not quenched. There need be no suffering from external causes—

there need be no infliction of corporeal punishment—the sinner may be simply left to himself—and in his own sinful condition he will have suffering enough to justify the use of the strongest language in which the Bible predicts his doom.

Even in this life, where there is so much to mitigate the wretchedness of the sinner, and where his environments are so much more favourable than they will be in the future world, sin sometimes proves a source of intolerable misery. I have seen a man with no bodily pain, without anything in his temporal circumstances to occasion unhappiness, without any external cause of mental depression or anxiety—I have seen him appear a very personification of wretchedness; despair depicted in every feature; hanging his head in sullen hopeless misery. I have been thrilled with his mournful cries. I have heard him declare that hell would be a welcome refuge if it would only hide him from himself. To escape from himself, to blot out the remembrance of the past, to terminate his own existence, to annihilate himself, to bury himself with all his thoughts and emotions in oblivion for ever:—that was his wish, and he sought to realise it with suicidal hand. I have seen that spectacle in God's earth, where the fruits of God's bounty were scattered around the man, and God's sky was bending over him, and where everything spoke of God's goodness. And if

sin will yield such suffering here—if even here the soul may be so tortured by itself as to wish itself out of existence—if it would forego all the delights which the earth can yield, for the sake of rest from its own torment—Oh, tell me not that Christianity speaks too harshly, when she employs such awful figures to describe the suffering of the sinner when he enters the unseen state!

But Christianity not only says you are a sinner and consequently liable to suffer; she also describes you as being helpless under that liability. You cannot by your own efforts obtain deliverance from punishment. God will not stultify himself and bring his law into contempt, by bestowing pardon on any terms which you are able to propose. Yours “is the dark and unsheltered state of condemnation; and if there be a single outlet or way of escaping, it cannot be such a way as will abolish the law and degrade the Lawgiver—but it must be such a way as will vindicate and exalt the Deity, as will pour a tide of splendour over the majesty of his high attributes; and as, in the sublime language of the prophet, will *magnify his law, and make it honourable*. To such a way you are fairly shut up. It is your only alternative.” But where or how can it be found? Who is able to provide it for himself? *The blood of bulls and of goats,*

though oceans of it were shed, *will not take away sin*. Diamonds from the mountain, and gold from the mine, do not constitute a price sufficient for the purchase of pardon. Neither can you by present or future well-doing atone for your past offences. God's law requires perfect obedience, from the first moment in which it addresses you, to the last of your conscious existence. It pronounces its curse against every shortcoming, as well as against every transgression. And however strictly you might henceforth comply with its requirements, it is impossible that a law which requires perfect obedience for every moment, can accept of future obedience as an atonement for the disobedience of the past. Nor are your services of such a nature as to meet its requirements even for the time in which they are rendered. The motive by which you are actuated, according to your own acknowledgment, is the desire to obtain exemption from punishment; whereas the law will only accept of that which is prompted by supreme love to God. Thus, struggle as you may, all your struggling will not suffice to secure your acquittal. After you have done your best, you will be haunted with the fearful consciousness that, while death is drawing nearer every day, your relations to your Maker are still unadjusted, and your sins still unforgiven.

Thus we have given what we believe to be a faithful and scriptural exposition of what Christianity says you are; and not you only, nor your class only, but every class to whom it comes. To expound this part of its message has been no welcome task. Much rather would we have preferred to dwell on its more agreeable utterances; but the one is as needful as the others, and prepares the way for their reception. The purpose of Christianity in telling you what you are—revealing to you your guilt, and consequent liability to suffering and helplessness under that liability, is not to involve you in despair; but that, feeling your own helplessness, you may be led to accept of the help which it affords. It does not make you acquainted with your miserable condition that it may leave you there, but induce you to avail yourselves of the only way of escape. It shews you what you are, that you may the better appreciate *what it proposes to make you*. And I trust the statements of this chapter, painful as they have been, may prepare the way for the exposition, in the following, of that more pleasing theme. Oh, turn not away from that which is unpleasant when you have reason to think it true! Unwelcome truth should be considered, as well as that which gratifies. If it be truth, however much it may pain you, you do not better your condition by keeping it out of sight. It is not the description of your state

that should trouble you, but the thought that your state is such. It were the wisest part to look at it steadfastly, and inquire how it should be treated? What is the course which in such a case it behoves you to pursue? It is vain, it is dangerous, to say, *Peace, peace, when there is no peace; but sudden destruction cometh.* It is a fearful thing to pass into another world *with a lie in your right hand*—a lie which you have fondly cherished throughout time, only that you might read its refutation in the light of eternity. Remember, your danger is neither averted, nor postponed, by being studiously overlooked. Whether you see it or not, it is coming on apace, and will overtake you before long. And, oh! if it be unpleasant to hear of it now, when you are told of it only that you may be induced to enter the refuge, what must it be—not to be told of it, but to *feel* it—when the soul has passed into the unseen state—to feel your doom settling down upon you, when the chance of escape is gone for evermore? I pray God that you may never know what it is; but that, listening to what Christianity says you are, giving heed to its solemn warnings, you may gladly avail yourself of the salvation which it brings,—that being rescued from the danger to which you are exposed and brought under the power of its sanctifying influences, you may realise in your experience all that it proposes to make you.

Then you will know what it is to be in harmony with yourself and at peace with God. Then *the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds.*

“Then the night shall be filled with music ;  
And the cares that infest the day  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away !”

## CHAPTER IV.

*What Christianity proposes to make you.*

HAVING attempted to give an exposition of what Christianity says you are, we have now to shew what Christianity proposes to make you—to describe the change which it proposes to effect in your state and character.

We say *proposes*, because it can only fulfil its purpose on your compliance with certain conditions. Its end is not answered, its contemplated transformation is not effected, the blessings it brings are not enjoyed, the character it commends is not promoted, in all to whom it comes, nor in all who profess to receive it; but only in those who receive its truths, yield themselves to its influences, and comply with its demands. There are counterfeit Christians—such as *have a name to live and are dead, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*. These, though living amid Christian privileges, and observing Christian ordinances, and bearing the Christian name, are not specimens of what Christianity is intended to make

mankind—they are not Christian men. They are only Christians who, through the reception of Christian truth, and under the transforming influences of the Divine Spirit, are having their characters moulded after the Divine will.

What was advanced in the preceding chapter will naturally influence, in some degree, the nature and order of our remarks in this. What Christianity proposes to make you, has reference to what Christianity says you are. It finds something wrong in you, and it proposes to make the wrong right. But this is not all. Its object is not only to rectify the evil of your condition—not only to remove what is bad from you; but to put you in possession of, and to produce in you, much that is good. It would not only save you from all that occasions unhappiness, but bestow upon you positive blessings which are highly fitted to contribute to your enjoyment. Accordingly, if we would fully describe what it proposes to make you, we shall have occasion to speak of the *state*, the *character*, and the *privileges* of the Christian man.

In speaking of what Christianity says you are, we shewed that it described your present state as a state of guilt and consequent liability to punishment; we have now to shew, in the first place, that, adapting itself to your condition, it proposes to bring you into a state of forgiveness—to make you a pardoned man.

The gospel is virtually and essentially a proclamation of pardon. It tells every one to whom it comes that there is forgiveness in Christ for him—a free, frank, full, complete, eternal forgiveness. *Be it known unto you*, says Paul, when addressing his countrymen, *that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins*. And the Saviour himself charged his Apostles, *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached, in his name, unto all nations*.

Some treat this as if it were too good to be true. They fancy they must become better than they are before it can be true of them. But if the gospel does not tell you this, I know not what it means. If it be not a proclamation of pardon, it is nothing. When a monarch sends an ambassador to a number of rebels, who to escape the consequences of his displeasure have fled to a distant land; and instructs him to intimate that he is propitiated toward them, and ready to receive them into favour, and that, in case of their returning, in token of their submission, he will re-instate them in all their possessions and privileges—does not that intimation amount to a proclamation of pardon? Now, such is precisely the nature of the gospel message. It is sent from heaven's King to his rebellious subjects, to let them know, that, through the mediation of his Son, he is propitiated toward them—that they are welcome to the enjoyment of his favour—and that on

compliance with the conditions which he imposes, they may be freed from the legal consequences of their rebellion, and made partakers of even greater blessings than they have forfeited by sin. Thus pardon is the burden of its message—pardon for all past offences—pardon provided and presented in Christ—pardon not to be wrought for or purchased, but, by faith, freely received. To all who listen to it, it says, virtually, "Let not the evil desert of your sins drive you to despair. I bring you pardon for the worst—for them all. Ye are as welcome to God's favour as if ye were sinless. The only obstacle to your safety is in yourselves; and in the belief of my message that obstacle disappears; ye receive the pardon which I bring, and pass out of your present state of liability to punishment, into a state in which God's word and all the perfections of his character are pledges for your safety."

The condition on which this forgiveness is to be enjoyed, as may be inferred from what has already been said, is the simplest of which it is possible to conceive. It is neither more nor less than that you should treat the message as it ought to be treated. And how is that? How should you act when God sends to tell you that there is pardon in Christ for you? What in such a case ought you to do? Perhaps we can best answer this question by asking how a number of condemned prisoners would treat a procla-

mation of pardon read to them by a herald from the Queen?—in what way they would conduct themselves in regard to it. Methinks, their only concern would be to know if they were not deceived—if the messenger could produce his credentials—if the document were not a forgery—if they understood him correctly—if it were really a proclamation of pardon. And the moment they were satisfied that it was even so, they would leap in their chains and cause their prison walls to ring with their shouts of joy; nor would they fail to let the allegiance of their future lives testify to their gratitude for the boon they had received. Precisely so should you treat the proclamation of pardon which Christianity brings from God to you. Your only concern should be to satisfy yourselves that it is God's proclamation—that you understand its import—and that, wonderful as it is, it is nevertheless true. And having such conclusive evidence of this as the Bible supplies, you have only to take God at his word, and to rejoice that pardon is yours, while you let your gratitude for so great a mercy find expression in such a life of devotedness, as the realization of God's loving-kindness must constrain you to lead.

It was said in the previous chapter, that God would not bring his law into contempt, by bestowing pardon on any terms which you are able to propose. And it must not be supposed that there is anything at vari-

ance with this statement in what we have now advanced. There is nothing meritorious in believing the gospel message, that God should pardon you on that account. And your belief is not the ground of pardon. It is not in consideration of it that God bestows pardon. It is the condition of its enjoyment, but not the ground of its bestowal. *That* is properly a righteousness which Christianity reveals—a righteousness which God has provided, and of which faith lays hold.

In the passages of Scripture cited above, the proclamation of pardon which Christianity brings is described as being made *through Christ*, and *in the name of Christ*. These phrases indicate the meritorious ground on which pardon is bestowed. It is by the mediation of Christ that God is propitiated; and on his account does he welcome you to the enjoyment of its favour. Having violated God's law, not once merely, but repeatedly, you could not by your own future obedience meet its requirements. But according to the testimony of the gospel, that which you could not do for yourself, Christ has done for you. By his obedience unto death he has wrought out, on your behalf, a righteousness which answers all the laws demand—*magnifies it and makes it honourable*, so that on account of that righteousness God can pardon you without lowering his attributes, or abolishing his law.

And it is through faith laying hold of that righteousness, and identifying you with it—claiming it as your own, that you are to receive and enjoy forgiveness.

The process is not difficult to explain, if we follow the guidance of Scripture and our own experience; and so important is a correct acquaintance with it, that we proceed, though at the risk of repetition, to make the attempt. Let us request your very close attention therefore to what follows. Observe: The gospel comes to tell us that Christ by his obedience unto death has wrought out a righteousness for all. The man who believes the proclamation of the gospel, receives this statement as true—is persuaded that it must be true, because God says it. And being persuaded that it must be true, he at once applies it to himself and concludes, with good reason, that, if the righteousness of Christ is wrought out for all, it is wrought out for him, and that he may without presumption call it his. Such a personal application is the necessary result of his faith. Feeling his need of salvation, he cannot believe an announcement which contains good news for all people, without inquiring if the good news be not applicable to himself. And the certain response to that inquiry is—a statement which concerns all must concern me—a righteousness which is provided for, and presented to all, must be provided for, and presented to me. And thus the

strong and unwavering conviction is produced.—*The righteousness of Christ is mine.*

Observe, again. The Gospel testifies that this righteousness wrought out for all and for him, has fulfilled all the requirements of the violated law, and rendered the offended law-giver well pleased. The man also receives this as true—is persuaded that it must be true, because God says it. And being persuaded of its truth, he at once concludes, and with good reason, that he needs no more—that a righteousness which magnifies the law, and makes God well-pleased, is enough for him to die with. He regards it as a sufficient ground of safety, though it be not aided or supplemented by any effort of his own; and ceasing from all attempt to save himself, he trusts in this. In himself he can discover nothing meritorious—nothing absolutely good—nothing which entitles him to the Divine favour; but he looks to Christ and finds in him a perfect righteousness which he can call his own. He hears the law pronouncing its curse on transgressors, and knows that that is his desert; but knowing also that he has in Christ a righteousness which meets the claims of the law, he dreads the curse no more. He knows that his sins have offended the Most High; but knowing at the same time that Christ has furnished him with a righteousness with which God is well pleased, he trembles not at the thought

of appearing in his presence. Thus his faith looks to that righteousness—lays hold of it—clings to it—identifies him with it—shelters himself under it. And having thus received it, and being thus identified with it, he receives the treatment which that righteousness deserves. Having taught him to confide in it, God will not violate his confidence, by disregarding the righteousness which he himself has provided, and of which he has testified his acceptance and approval. The desert of the sinner's deeds is hell; but seeing that in consequence of his testimony, that sinner regards the righteousness of Christ as his, and trusts in it for salvation, God will never shew that the sinner's confidence in his testimony was misplaced. Pleased with his Son's righteousness, which he has warranted that sinner to lay hold of as his own, and as sufficient for his salvation, he treats the sinner, not according to his own deserts, but according to the merits of that righteousness of which salvation is the proper reward. And thus, though the man deserves to die, and to die eternally, in consequence of what he himself hath done, he lives, and lives eternally, in consequence of receiving by faith that which has been done by another.

Such is the change which Christianity proposes to effect in your state. Believing its proclamation, you are at once forgiven. The pardon which the gospel

brings enters the soul on the reception of its message. It is no sooner received than the man is forgiven, and he knows it. He passes, consciously, out of a state of liability to punishment into a state of perfect security. He is freed from that apprehension of wrath, which now haunts and sometimes tortures you. His forgiveness is complete. His sins are as perfectly cancelled as though they had never been. You have seen, on a bright summer day, the thunder-cloud suddenly darken the face of the sky; and you have seen the rain fall, and the cloud disappear from the horizon, leaving the sky brighter, and the atmosphere softer and balmy, and all nature more cheerful than before. Just so is it with the sins of the believer. *I have blotted out*, says Jehovah, *as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.* They are cast into the depths of the sea; where they can be found no more. They are removed *far as the east is from the west*; and that is an infinite distance. No cloud now darkens his spiritual horizon. No gathering storm excites his fears. Far as the eye can reach he sees only the cloudless sunshine of Jehovah's love. Triumphantly he could, on his own behalf, address to the listening universe, the Apostle's challenge, *Who is he that condemneth?* and meet every charge with the Apostle's answer, *God hath justified—Christ hath died.* Nor is this confidence unfounded, or likely to fail in the sea-

son of affliction, or the hour of death, when trouble tries it, or the solemnities of the judgment-day seem nigh at hand. Have not its utterances been heard many a time, in the immediate prospect of death, and amid the pangs of dissolution? Can we not quote the sayings of the dying, spoken when the body was racked with pain—sayings which they had scarcely strength enough to utter—and which seemed to linger on their lips as the spirit took its flight—expressive of the most unshaken confidence? How often, when friends stood weeping around, have the faltering lips testified to the enjoyment of perfect peace! How often, when speech has failed, has the feeble hand been waved in token of that triumph which the tongue could not express! How often has the dying eye beamed as if it caught a glimpse of the distant glory! How often have the pale and haggard features been lit up into loveliness by the rapture which glowed within! How often do they testify that the peace which has lasted during life, is now so augmented that it passeth all understanding—illustrating and confirming the beautiful language of Scripture, which compares their peace to a river—a river, inasmuch as it deepens and expands, increases in volume and in power, as it flows onward to the ocean of eternity. How often is the chamber of the dying man a scene of purer, vaster joy than the room where friends assemble to celebrate the nuptials

of youth and beauty ! How often, to the thinking of those who minister there, is it transformed into the vestibule of heaven ! How often, amid the silence of the scene, have they seemed to hear the rustling of angels' wings, shedding the fragrance of heaven on the soul which they waited to waft on high ; and to catch the whisper of angelic voices, saying, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*, while their own hearts have echoed, if their lips have not uttered—

“ How blest the righteous when he dies !  
When sinks a weary soul to rest,  
How mildly beam the closing eyes ;  
How gently heaves the expiring breast !

So fades a summer cloud away ;  
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er ;  
So gently shuts the eye of day ;  
So dies a wave along the shore.”

Thus, my brother, does the Christian die. Thus would Christianity enable you to die. This indicates the change which it would effect in your condition. This, as regards your state, is what Christianity proposes to make you.

But it has been shewn that the cause of your liability to punishment is your sinful character ; and that to be sinful is to be wretched. And, accordingly, Christianity would be of little value, if it only delivered you from the suffering to which you are exposed from external sources, and left you unchanged in yourself. With your feelings—your enmity against God, your

accusing conscience, your evil propensities at variance with the dictates of your sounder judgment, the different parts of your nature at war with each other—freedom from all penal inflictions would not suffice for your happiness. Although every outward occasion of suffering were withdrawn, you would have a source of wretchedness in your own nature. No change in your circumstances or relations can free you from that. You might have nothing to apprehend from any other being, but you would have much to fear from yourself. You might be delivered from hell, but you would have a hell within you. You might be admitted to heaven, but you would carry with you there the substantial wretchedness of hell. If you remain *as* you are, it will make little difference *where* you are. Some think—if they could just get to heaven! Their imagination is so mightily charmed and delighted by the descriptions of its loveliness and grandeur which the Bible contains, that they think, if they were only there all would be well with them. But if they have not the character which secures to them a foretaste of heaven's happiness here, their admission there would make little difference. Hell is not so much in the circumstances which surround a man as in the man himself. Heaven is not so much in the circumstances which surround a man as in the man himself. The splendour which lights it up; the beauty which is

impressed on all its scenes; the magnificence which abounds in it; the music produced by the ceaseless "concord of seraphic voices;"—these will yield enjoyment when the heart is in harmony with them. But place a man in the fairest of heaven's scenes—surround him with its most beautiful objects—let him have access to all its material sources of enjoyment; and let a Cain-like conscience torture him with its accusations—let his heart be filled with fiend-like hatred of God—let his unhallowed passions rage tumultuously—and the magnificence and beauty of the scene will afford no consolation to his perturbed spirit. Though heaven's happiness is bursting forth around him, and the music of heaven is sounding in his ears, he will have wrapped in his own dark soul all the anguish of a hell. Everything around him would be at discord with himself. Heaven's happiness, by contrast, would increase his misery. Its calm would render the tumult of his passions more difficult to endure. He would prefer to be beaten by the storm—to plunge into the darkness—to mingle in the fray and in the fierce contentions of apostate spirits, because more in harmony with the state of his own nature. From this, even hell's dark cavern would be a welcome refuge; and with the apostate *Son of the morning*, he would exclaim, as he plunged into the deep—

"Hail, horrors! hail,  
Infernal world! And thou, profoundest hell!"

Such being the case, if Christianity, while it changed your external relations, produced no alteration in yourself—if it did not make you better, it would prove, as a remedial scheme, altogether inadequate to your necessities. It would only open the door of your prison without freeing you from the deadly fever which you have contracted there. It would exempt you from the stroke of the executioner, while it left you to sink under the influence of the poison which you have taken. It would deliver you from a local hell, only that you might wander about seeking rest, in vain, from the hell in your own heart. And were this all it could do for you, I do not see that it would be of much consequence whether you received it or not.

But I have to shew, in the second place, that Christianity, adapting itself to your necessities, in this respect also, proposes to effect a transformation in your character, as well as a change in your state. Its object is to make you holy, as well as to pardon you; and, indeed, it attaches greater importance to the one than the other. It makes provision for your deliverance, not only from the curse of a violated law, but also and chiefly from the corruption of a depraved heart—not only for release from the infliction of pain, but also for your redemption from the dominion of passion. It is less hostile to suffering than it is to sin; more intent on the promotion of your holiness than your

happiness. To deliver from condemnation and suffering, important as it is, is only a secondary object; its grand design is to make man perfect in the image, and to produce in him unqualified submission to the will, and unbroken sympathy with the character, of God. All the blessings it confers before this end is gained, are to be regarded as stepping-stones to its attainment. Pardon is a mean of purification; freedom from condemnation is preparatory to freedom from the sin by which condemnation is incurred. The very same gospel which tells you that Christ came to save, tells you also that Christ came to sanctify, and that sanctification was the great object of his death. If we read, that *Christ gave himself for us*, we read in the same sentence, that he gave himself to *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*. If we are told that *the grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men*, we are also told in the same breath, that *denying ourselves of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. And, not to multiply quotations, do we not read in the same connexion, in which we are told, that the righteousness of Christ is our title to heaven—do we not read, that without a personal meetness—without holiness of character, we cannot enter there? These statements being so closely con-

nected, it is impossible to overlook the one while we take notice of the other. And being both perceived, they are both credited; for both rest upon the same Divine authority. The belief of the gospel arises out of a state of mind, which receives as true every part of the Divine testimony; so that the belief of the truth which saves is accompanied by the belief of other truths which shew you plainly that you need, and stimulate you to the cultivation of, a pure and holy character.

But nothing is so conducive to this end as the truth which tells you, that there is pardon in Christ for you. This is of such a nature, that, the moment it enters the mind, it produces that love to God which is the essence of spiritual life. As one beautifully says, "That blessed life comes unbidden, unsought, not after and as the reward of believing the truth, but in the very bosom of the truth itself. The belief of the one is the entrance and the actual commencement of the other. Let the eye but see that truth of heaven in heaven's own light, and the heart, at once, without a thought, and without an effort, feels throughout all its powers, the first movements of a new and better life, feels those calm, and confiding, and loving feelings, which are the very elements of the heavenly life, and which ever deepening and expanding as the truth is better known, spring up at last into life ever-

lasting. . . . For what is this truth—what is in it—in this little, despised, and seemingly impotent thing? Why all heaven is in it, for God himself is in it—the sinner's God—God in his gracious aspect toward the lost. There is a universe of love in it, and a universe of holiness in it; both in blessed harmony—both embodied, and both for us. There is an all-sufficient atonement in it, and an infinitely perfect righteousness in it, and the friendship and favour of the Highest in it, and all the other parts of a full salvation in it, and everything is free. Emmanuel himself is in it, in all his fulness; the sinner's portion; the sinner's all; with life, legal, spiritual, and eternal in Him. And to suppose a truth like this, so instinct, so pregnant with all Divine realities, to enter into the soul of a poor condemned sinner, without carrying life along with it, and diffusing that life at once through all the powers of his being, is much the same as to suppose, that the darkness of midnight should still continue when the sun has risen to highest noon, and, cloudless, is pouring down his full flood of splendour into the bosom of the prostrate earth."

The blessings which this truth brings, cannot fail to awaken a feeling of gratitude in their recipients; and gratitude is one of the most powerfully operative principles of which the human heart is susceptible, constraining its subjects to do the will of him to

whom it relates. The love displayed in the communication of those blessings must, when perceived, elicit a kindred feeling in its objects, for it is by the sight of love that love is produced. And that love is coupled with such a manifestation of hatred of sin, and those blessings have been procured for the guilty at the expense of so much suffering on the part of the innocent One who occupied their place, that hatred of sin and a sense of its deserts mingle with the sinner's rejoicing over his deliverance from its penal results. Thus love to God and hatred of sin become the master principles of his nature. And as the truth is more clearly perceived, and more fully comprehended, and more powerfully applied by the Divine Spirit, whose instrument it is, these principles increase in strength—more powerfully repelling from the practice of sin, and attracting to the cultivation of holiness, until the man stands complete in God's image and every part of his nature is in harmony with God's life. God's will is his will; God's glory his end; God's perfections the object of his profoundest adoration. He lives in God—walks with God—sees God in every thing—recognises God's goodness in every gift, and thankfully receives every manifestation of God's favour. The consciousness of God's presence is his support; the assurance of God's approval his abundant reward. Then the man's nature is in har-

mony with itself. There is no schism between its different parts. The passions and the judgment are no longer at variance. The judgment is supreme; and all the lower parts of his nature, which are designed to be subordinate, are exercised under its guidance and control. The accusations of conscience are hushed. He is free from self-upbraidings. His actions command the approval of his better self. He regards his course with complacency. Having God for the chief end of his being, the soul rests in him, and revolves around him; and with all his faculties in harmonious exercise, every motion is musical, and all contribute to make him a partaker of that enjoyment which constitutes a foretaste of the happiness of heaven. This is what Christianity would make you, as regards your character. This is the transformation which it proposes to effect. You say, all are not such who are called Christians. And we admit the fact. But it should be remembered, that many call themselves Christians who have no right to the name. All Christians are such as we have described, just to the extent to which they have yielded themselves to the influence of Christianity; nor will it fail to make you such, if you prove faithful to its claims. Look on this picture, and on that which Christianity paints when it shews you what you are—a picture which you know is only too accurate—and then say which is to be preferred?

But this is not all: Christianity not only proposes to change your state, and transform your character; it would also raise you to a position of dignity and privilege. It should commend itself peculiarly to the poorer and labouring classes, from the fact that it invests its subjects with a dignity, in comparison with which those earthly distinctions after which men aspire are not worthy to be named. We can only glance briefly at a few of the privileges which it confers; but if we can present those few in a proper light, they will give you a most exalted conception of what Christianity proposes to make you.

Bringing you into harmony with God, it would bring God down to you, and thus make you the temple of the Most High. However poor a Christian man may be—however coarse his clothing—however homely his fare—though his frame be deformed, and his countenance disfigured, by his excessive toil, I must hold him in higher estimation than I do all the glory of the earth and the grandeur of the heavens, for *He who dwelleth not in temples made with hands—whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, and who maketh the earth his footstool*, has said, *To that man will I look, and with him will I dwell, who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word.* What an honour to a poor man, whom the world passes by as unworthy of its regard, that the Most High should

condescend in some peculiar manner to dwell in him! How this elevates him above surrounding circumstances, and renders him conscious of a dignity, which infinitely transcends all the honours of the world! Its realization is enough to make him superior to the proud man's contumely and the rich man's scorn, imparting to him the consciousness that he is greater than they. And what dignity does it give to the character! How can he stoop to what is mean—how engage in any degrading pursuit—how act a part unworthy of his manhood, when he considers that he would thereby defile the temple of God?

But Christianity also makes men sons of God. Producing in you filial feelings, it would invest you with all the privileges of sonship. To its subjects it says, *Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God.* There is no dignity pertaining to any earthly relation which—I shall not say is equal to—but which it would not be blasphemy seriously to mention in comparison with this. Sons of God! Why, the very prospect of such a dignity is enough to excite in you the strongest desire, and to secure your compliance with all the requirements of Christianity. Sons of God! To think of his attri-

butes—of his majesty, and then to reflect that we sustain such a relation! To survey his works—to look around on the scenes of magnificence and beauty with which the earth abounds, and to feel that we are the sons of Him who made them all! To gaze on the heavens at night—and as we are moved now to rapture and now to tears, by the magnificence of the scene and the thoughts which it suggests—to be able to say, These worlds were made by him whom I call my Father—who condescends to own me for his child—of whose nature I am a partaker—who cares for me, and will soon take me to himself! Compared with this, how the world dwindles into insignificance, and how paltry and contemptible are its emoluments and its honours! You pay homage to the scions of nobility and of royalty; be it so; I do not quarrel with you on that account. But for my part, I am bound to respect far more that workman in the street, however mean his appearance, who has the grace of God in his heart. In all that entitles him to honour, he is the superior of the other. That other, you say, is the son of a king, or of a lord; but what of that? Is not this man the son of Him who is the *King of kings* and *Lord of lords*? The other inhabits a splendid mansion, you say, is the heir of thousands of broad acres, and of a coronet or a crown; what of that? Is not this man's palace *a house not made with hands*? Is

he not the heir of a *kingdom which cannot be moved*? Is not his a diadem *a crown of glory which fadeth not away*? The other, you say, has a great retinue of servants—scores of menials do his bidding and run at his beck; what of that? Has not this man *angels ministering unto him*? Does not God *give them charge over him to keep him in all his ways*? Wonder not, if, with all his poverty, independence is stamped on his manly brow, if he bears himself with dignity in presence of the rich and the noble, and sometimes treats their distinctions with contempt; he is conscious of his superiority—conscious that “he is rich in a more precious treasure, noble by the right of an earlier creation,” and the bearer of an infinitely more honourable name!

Again, Christianity would bring you into the position in which it becomes true of you, that all the events which transpire here are conducive to your welfare. What Macaulay says so eloquently of the Puritans, may be applied to himself by the poorest Christian, “Before the heavens and the earth were created,” he may say, “I was chosen by God to a felicity which shall last when these have passed away,” and all things that have taken place in the earth have been subsidiary to the fulfilment of his eternal purpose. “Events which short-sighted politicians ascribe to earthly causes, have been ordained on my account.

For my sake empires have risen, and flourished, and decayed. For me the Almighty has proclaimed his will by the pen of the Evangelist and the harp of the Prophet. For me the sun has been darkened; for me the rocks were rent; for me the dead have arisen, and all nature shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God." My welfare was kept in view in creation; the dispensations of Providence have relation to me; God will take care of me when the earth is wrapped in flames. Why should my poverty disturb my peace or awaken my concern? *Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

Once more, Christianity would make you the heir of everlasting life. Poor as you may be, were you a Christian, you might stand up in the midst of your poverty, and lay claim to an inheritance with which all the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them will bear no comparison. What does it matter to me, you might say, whether I am poor or rich, when I have such an inheritance awaiting me. Seest thou the possessions of my wealthy neighbour:—fair as they are, I covet them not. The event which must

separate him from his inheritance will introduce me to mine. I shall be enjoying my portion when his house has crumbled into ruins—when his fair fields have passed away—when his gold has melted in the final conflagration. Seest thou those worlds that roll through the vault of night?—I, now standing under them—I, so poor and despised—I, that must toil from morning till night, as if the end of my existence were to procure food to eat and raiment to clothe me—I shall live when those worlds have grown old. My joy shall be undiminished when their light has become dim. When the heavens have been rolled together as a parchment-scroll, and another and fairer creation has sprung from the hand of God, I shall be only in the infancy of my being—in the youth of my immortality—in the spring-tide of my year—in the dawn of my eternal day. Oh, what does it matter to me whether I am poor and needy, or have a right to call the world my own—I am but a little hour here, and then I bid farewell to all my privations, and enter on the glory and the riches that are to come—eternally to come!

This, my reader, is what Christianity proposes to make you;—and is not this worthy of your ambition? It is reason enough, at least, for our asking you to give to Christianity your careful consideration. Form not your conceptions of it from the representations of

the infidel, who knows not what it is, and can no more judge of its value than a blind man can of colours. Go to that Christian man who feels its power, and let him tell you of its worth. If you find those who are qualified to speak of it, they will assure you that, in the midst of their deepest poverty, when the battle of life was most difficult to fight, it has rendered them superior to their hard lot. In all their sorrows they have been solaced with the Saviour's friendship and the prospect of their heavenly home. They have had no trial in which its consolations did not abound. They do not despise wealth; but, were they left to choose, they would not part with their poverty, if with it they must lose the consolations of religion, though they could obtain in exchange the wealth, with the godlessness, of many of the rich. Oh, wonderful is the superiority to all earthly distinctions which religion imparts! He whose life is not unworthy of it, moves amid the poorest circumstances with the dignity of a prince—a dignity all the more noticeable and praiseworthy that his environments are so mean. "Sublimar in this world know I nothing than a peasant saint. . . . Such an one will take thee back to Nazareth itself; thou wilt see the splendour of Heaven spring forth from the humblest depths of Earth, like a light shining in great darkness." Admire such an one, if thou wilt,

my brother. He deserves admiration. But admire more the religion which has made him such. It comes to thee, commended by these results, which, as a seal of Heaven, give it authority and attractiveness. Bow before it, that it may make thee glad and glorious—fill thee with joy, and invest thee with nobleness—ally thee to God, and make thee the heir of endless life. *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

## CHAPTER V.

*What Christianity will do for you now.*

HAVING, in the preceding chapter, attempted to shew what Christianity proposes to make you, in state, in character, and in privilege, we now proceed to point out its influence on the present life, or, in other words, to shew how it will affect your temporal and social condition.

We are aware of the great importance which is attached to present comfort, and of the aversion which is cherished toward anything which does not prove profitable in a temporal point of view. And though we do not think that a religion should be tried, exclusively, by such a test, since it may be a man's duty sometimes to sacrifice the visible to the invisible, and the temporal to the eternal—and though we deem the argument one of the lowest which can be advanced on behalf of Christianity, and would contend for its Divinity and authority though this argument failed—yet, seeing you attach to it so much importance, we do not shrink from meeting you on your own ground,

and trying Christianity by your own test, feeling assured that we can shew, even to your satisfaction, and to the refutation of Secularist assertions, that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come.*

If, taking the lowest ground at the commencement, we proceed on the supposition that Christianity produces no alteration in the temporal condition of its subjects, and that their outward circumstances are precisely the same as those of the irreligious, it may still be shewn, that, in relation to these, Christianity exerts a benign influence, enhancing the joy of prosperity, neutralising the effects of adversity, and divesting the mind of that fear of being separated from them by death, which so frequently interferes with life's enjoyments, and sheds a gloom over its happiest hours.

It is not only true, as we have previously shewn, that a Christian man may partake of every innocent pleasure; it is also true, that, in case of his having access to the same sources of pleasure as the ungodly, he can enjoy them with a relish which is peculiarly his own. Without religion you may have health, and you may prize it—you may rejoice over the prosperity of your family—you may greatly enjoy

your comfortable home—you may survey the beauty of the earth, or the magnificence of the heavens, and derive enjoyment from the scene; but how much superior is the joy which such sources would afford could you say, “All these are the gifts of my Father. He has surrounded me with these sources of enjoyment. From his hand all these blessings come.” Could you thus rise from the creature to the Creator—could you trace your pleasures to their primal source—could you regard them as pledges of God’s friendship and earnest of future good—then you would experience a purer and a vaster joy than you can ever know while you seek your portion in created good, and do not, in the multitude of his gifts, recognise the goodness of the Giver.

Then it must be acknowledged that Christian men, as well as others, have been, and may be, in the providence of God, deprived of these blessings. We do not aver that godliness is always gain in a temporal point of view; nor that piety invariably secures family prosperity in the sense in which these terms are generally understood. But we contend that though Christianity does not always secure these blessings (albeit such is its natural tendency), its benign influence is seen in rendering men superior to their loss. However it may be accounted for, and strange as it may seem to you, the fact is amply attested by

experience, that it has power to render its subjects as happy, though destitute of everything which is deemed essential to comfort, as if they possessed all earthly good. Many a time has it sustained them under the depressing influence of poverty, and kept their minds in perfect peace amid the severest pangs of affliction and bereavement. Lonely widows in unfurnished hovels, with scarcely a crust of bread to eat, without sufficient clothing to shelter them from the wintry blast, it has rendered happier by far than the rich amid all their wealth. It has enabled men with meek resignation, and even joyful acquiescence, to bow to the stroke which shattered their fondest hopes, tore from them the dearest objects of their affections, and inflicted excruciating bodily pain. Be it true or false, this it has done. There is no denying the fact, that through their Christianity they have triumphed over their adversity. Hope, driven from earthly objects, has plumed its wings for a loftier flight, and, piercing the clouds which envelope this lower region, has looked into the invisible and eternal world. And where you might have expected the complaints of the sufferer, the language of resignation and thankfulness is heard. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be com-*

*pared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* You cannot account for such language in your present state of mind; and perhaps you have united with others in denouncing it as hypocritical cant. But it is often the genuine expression of feeling, notwithstanding; nor is it surprising that it should be so, if the pretensions of Christianity are just. The poor man may well rejoice in his poverty, and the afflicted in his affliction, when they have a mind at peace with itself—when God is their portion—when, in the exercise of his love and wisdom, he ordains whatsoever happens to them, and renders all things conducive to their good—when, though poor in relation to this world, they are rich as the heirs of another—when, though afflicted here, they must soon go where *God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more*—when their present trials can only render their future rest the more delightful, and add to the glory of their eternal home. In such a state, we say, and with such prospects, a man may rejoice even in tribulation; and professing to do so much for its subjects, if it be not a mere pretence, Christianity must exert a most benign influ-

ence on the present life, as well as secure the enjoyment of the life that is to come.

In the case of many, nothing so interferes with the enjoyment of life as the constant fear of death. And in determining, therefore, how any system is likely to affect your temporal condition, it is important to ascertain, what will be its influence when you are called to part with life—how it will enable you to die. I need scarcely say, that, tried by this test, the influence of Christianity appears highly advantageous. Tending to promote health and prosperity, and giving to every innocent pleasure a peculiar zest, it might be expected to bind men more firmly to life, and to increase the dismay with which they regard the prospect of dissolution, whereas it, in reality, reconciles men to the loss of earthly good, and enables them without regret to part with all they possess. To the irreligious man, the awfulness of death is increased by every addition to the pleasures of life; the more he has, the more painful is the thought of losing it, and the more awful, by contrast, is the desolation of the future. But to the happiest Christian, death is most completely divested of its terrors. The more enjoyment he has derived from religion, he is the better prepared to die, because the more assured, and the better able to conceive, of the transcendent happiness which it secures for him in another state of being.

To him death is not, as with the worldling, the termination of a happy life, and the commencement of a miserable futurity; but a separation from present enjoyments, and an entrance on others by which they are infinitely surpassed. It is the transition from the chequered scenes and mingled joys of earth, to the cloudless skies and the perfect bliss of heaven. It is the vestibule of glory. It is the prophet's chariot of fire in which he ascends to his Father's house, leaving behind the mantle of mortality with all its infirmities and pains. And viewing it in this light, it is not possible that the anticipation of the event can shed a gloom over his happiest hours, or interfere with the enjoyment of earthly good. The thought, I must die, however suddenly, and however forcibly, presented to his mind, excites no alarm, mars no pleasure, when he *desires to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.*

There is nothing of an external nature, perhaps, so intimately connected with our happiness as the family relation. Few men are insensible to the charm which resides in that word home. There are few words around which cluster so many pleasing associations. Oftentimes the mention of it is sufficient to awaken the most affecting reminiscences. As before the eye of memory it brings up the past, the heart thrills

under the recollection of departed joys. No scenes are so lovely as the haunts of our boyhood, where the air rang with our childish glee; no voice so sweet as that which soothed our early griefs, or that other which in riper years, by its encouraging accents, nerved our faltering manhood; no fire-side, however superior to it in material comforts, can equal the wanderer's remembrance of that which was his own; no spot on earth presents such attractions as that which lies under the roof-tree of our childhood's home. From distant lands the heart turns to it wistfully; and should it in the course of events be razed to its foundations—should the ploughshare pass over its site, or modern improvements destroy its familiar features, still the old house is engraven on the tablet of our memory, and is not likely to be erased, so far as we can see, while memory endures.

All this is true of homes in general—true, indeed, of all homes except such as are cursed by inordinate selfishness or riotous passion. Let there be but an average amount of the kindly feelings of humanity exercised, and home attractions are always powerful. And when the true idea of home is fully realized—when mutual confidence and sympathy are cherished—when kind attentions soothe the sufferer, and each member seeks the welfare of the others—when they anticipate that they may gratify each other's desires—

when kind and profitable intercourse enlivens the passing hour—no earthly scene which I have been privileged to witness, is so fitted to suggest the thought of heaven.

A great portion of men's time is usually spent at home. It is the place where they rest after the toil of the day, and to which they naturally return from all their wanderings. There they expect to be best understood, and there they act with the greatest freedom. There they feel and appear most like themselves. The restraint and formality which characterise their more public movements are laid aside when they enter the precincts of home; and the mind unbends itself to indulge in the playful and confiding intercourse of friendship; or, should it be more in accordance with its mood, wraps itself in its own thoughts. There man expects that none of his acts will be unfavourably construed—that his complaints will be addressed to listening ears—that his ruffled feelings will be soothed by words of sympathy. It is his place of refuge from the chafings and annoyances of his more public life. He goes forth into the world braced for the battle which he could not fight so well were he not able to retreat from it into the quiet of home. In public he expects the unpleasant, and bears it patiently, when he knows he can return to the agreeable influences of his own fire-side. Accordingly, the state

of his home is most intimately connected with his enjoyments; and anything by which it is materially affected will exert a most important influence, for good or for evil, on the happiness of his life.

Christianity, extending as it does to every department of human life, exercises a mighty power over the home and family relations; and we claim for it, that its influence is always exerted for good, never for evil. Where do you look for the most happy families? Not, surely, in heathen lands, whose degraded tribes have not the slightest conception of home comforts. Not in Mohammedan countries, where woman is degraded, and polygamy destroys the peace and the confidence which should distinguish the family relation. Not among the nations of antiquity, where men were without natural affection—where infanticide and parricide prevailed. But in the nations of Christendom—in your own England, where Christianity invests the marriage tie with the most awful sanctions, and by the most powerful motives, enjoins the cultivation of filial affection, and the wise exercise of parental discipline tempered by parental love. And which are the happiest homes in Christendom, or in England? In which is the idea of home most fully realized? Not where wealth spreads its luxuries. Not where rank showers its honours. Not where fashion is the presiding deity. Not where the ap-

plause of the world is courted and its pleasures eagerly pursued. Too many fire-sides which are cheerless with all their splendour—too many hearts aching beneath satin robes and chains of gold—testify that all these do not suffice to make home happy. The happy home is the home where Christ is a constant guest ; or, if you will, where Christianity, exerting its influence on the heart, regulates the actions, and gives a charm to the intercourse, of those who are dwellers there. It may be very humble—it may have its seasons of adversity like others—death may enter and snatch away some of its most cherished ones—but Christianity will so enhance its joys, so support under its trials, so chasten and sanctify its sorrows, as to convert that humble—that afflicted and bereaved home, into a very heaven upon earth—diffusing through it as much of heaven's happiness as earth may hope to know.

Let any one read those precepts of the New Testament which apply to the relative duties of husband and wife, parent and child ; and he cannot but acknowledge that obedience to these is all that is required to render home happy. Nor is it by precept only that Christianity tends to this result. It places the various members of the family in a new and interesting light. Representing them as immortal, and as redeemed by the blood of Christ, it invests them with a peculiar importance in the estimation of each

other, on account of which they are loved not less, but more wisely, than before. Moreover, by bringing the heart into contact with the love of God, it serves to quicken, as well as to purify, every natural affection. Having the heart filled with love, we look lovingly on every being, and especially on those to whom we are most intimately related. Knowing that God loves all, and wills us to be like him—that love is the atmosphere of heaven, and creates a heaven on earth, we have all-powerful and never-failing motives for the exercise of affection towards our fellows, and especially towards those who, being bound to us by special ties, have a special claim on our affectionate regard. Thus family affection is strengthened by the feelings of nature being invested with the sacredness of religion, and the character of heaven being imparted to the relations of earth.

In speaking of the family relation, we cannot but dwell for a little on the breaches to which it is constantly liable, for the purpose of shewing what consolation Christianity affords under such painful dispensations. Happy as you may be in your family circle, you know too well that it must soon be broken. Much as you may love your wife, you know that either she must mourn your departure, or with a sad heart you must follow her body to the tomb. Your children will be left one day without your counsel, or

you must part with them one by one, and be left like a leafless tree in the wintry blast—the world stripped of its charms for you—your heart buried in the grave which contains the objects of your love. And that happy group of brothers and sisters—ah! how soon may their dust mingle, or their graves be

“Severed far and wide,  
By mount, and stream, and sea!”

How desolate at such times is the heart that knows not the consolations of religion! The mother bends over the lifeless form of her child, and gazes into its pale face unable to tear herself away; for it is her last look—she has no hope of meeting it again. The man commits to the dust his wife, his parents, his brother or sister; and henceforth they cease to exist for him. They have become food for the worm—handfuls of dust. Much as he loved them he hopes to see their face and to hear their voice no more. He may call them; but they do not answer. He may listen; but they speak not. He may look and wait for them in the morning dawn, or the evening shade, or the silence of the midnight hour; but they never come. His heart sinks beneath the crushing thought, that they are lost to him for evermore. But when Christianity exerts its influence, and sustains us by its hopes, how it enables us to triumph over the ravages of death. While we look on the body from which life has fled,

faith follows the soul in her upward course, until she mingles with the spirits of just men made perfect, in the presence of God and the Lamb. We commit the remains of our friend to the dust, and though we mourn the temporary separation, we know that that which the grave receives is but the dress of the man—the tabernacle in which the soul was confined—that he himself has soared on high, and is not lost but gone before us to our eternal home. We know too that the grave shall resign its prey—that from the dust which slumbers there a more glorious form shall spring. Looking down into the narrow house, while the clods are rumbling on the coffin-lid, we can say with the most perfect assurance,—

“ Grave—the guardian of our dust !  
Grave—the treasury of the skies !  
Every atom of thy trust  
Rests in hope again to rise.”

*This corruptible must put on incorruption This mortal must put on immortality. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. Then severed friends shall meet again. Then the mother shall press her child to her breast in an ecstasy of joy. Then sisters and brothers shall be locked in each other's embrace. Then the father shall be surrounded with the members of his family; and heaven shall witness the renewed—and more vigorous*

exercise of those affections, which were the source of some of earth's sweetest and holiest enjoyments.

Hitherto we have spoken only of the influence of Christianity on the minds of its subjects. It must not be supposed, however, that that is the only way in which it promotes man's welfare during the present life. On the contrary, although it does not invariably secure, it frequently issues in, and *naturally* tends to the promotion of, temporal prosperity.

Health and longevity are elements of such prosperity; and Christianity is favourable to both. Viewed as a proof of this, we do not attach much importance to its prohibition of those reckless and dissipated habits by which health is destroyed, and life abbreviated; because religion is not essential to place men, in this respect, under restraint. Many a worldly man avoids all practices of the kind as carefully as the Christian. At the same time, it would be wrong to overlook the fact while estimating the tendency of the Christian religion.

It is a much more important consideration, that, by stimulating to activity the dormant powers of the mind, Christianity naturally tends to produce thoughtful and prudent habits. These once called into existence, are exercised in various directions, and lead, naturally, to that careful observance of the laws of

nature, by which health is preserved and life prolonged.

It will be no hindrance, but a powerful motive to this observance, that Christians, are taught to regard themselves as being *not their own, but bought with a price*, and that their lives are not to be thoughtlessly placed in jeopardy, nor their faculties recklessly wasted or destroyed, but carefully husbanded for, and consecrated to, the service of him who has bought them with his blood.

It is well known how important to bodily health it is that the mind should be calm and undisturbed. And were it only that it delivers men from all mental harassment and anxiety, the tendency of Christianity to promote healthfulness would be sufficiently obvious. By imparting the consciousness of pardon, it saves from the remorseful recollection of the past. By the assurance that the Lord will provide all needful good, and overrule for good all existing evils, it prevents painful anxiety for the present. It destroys all fear for the future, by holding out a prospect of glory greater than the imagination can conceive. And thus it keeps the mind in perfect peace. Only let its influence be felt, and its blessings fully enjoyed, and it will do much to preserve the countenance from those furrows, and the frame from those symptoms of premature decay, which are the result of incessant care,

or severe internal struggles. And hence it is written that while many wicked men do not live out half their days, *The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree ; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

But Christianity is not more favourable to health than it is to industry; and, consequently, to social elevation. We make this statement in full view of the fact, that some religious men are indolent, and more fain to reap the fruit of others' industry than to toil for their own maintenance. For though we admit the fact, we deny that it is attributable to religion. They are indolent, not because of their religion, but in spite of it; and indolent, because, having but partially acquired the mastery over them, it has not yet completely conquered their native tendency. They are improved just to the extent to which they have come under its influence. Idle when it found them—more idle than they are now, they would have remained more idle still had it not, to some extent, counteracted their native tendency by the powerful motives to activity which it supplies.

It requires no very careful examination of Scripture to conduct to the conclusion, that indolence is most at variance with its precepts and its spirit. The Book of Proverbs is never likely to become the pocket companion of the sluggard, if he wishes to gratify and to foster his love of ease. When that becomes his

favourite study, we may conclude that he is in a hopeful state—that he has begun to do battle with, and is taking the most likely means to conquer his tendency to sloth. And the fact that the exhortations and counsels of that book find an echo, though in briefer space, in the pages of the New Testament, is enough to justify the statement, that the Scriptures make men acquainted with their duty as citizens of the world, and furnish them with directions which are necessary to their proper discharge.

To direct, however, is comparatively easy. A much more important and difficult matter is to secure compliance with the directions when given. And it is in this that religion bears most powerfully on secular pursuits. It naturally tends to produce that character and those habits which are conducive to success in any lawful calling. From what it says of the value of time and the brevity of life, the Christian sees the importance of diligence and activity. Plying him with powerful motives, it gives that concentration to the mind by which he is enabled to pursue, steadfastly, the course which he adopts. Animated by its promises and hopes, he can treat lightly, or rise above, the most discouraging circumstances. The strong feelings which it awakens give force to the character. By the watchfulness which it enjoins and the joy which it yields, it preserves him from many tempta-

tions to idleness and vice. And you cannot but see that the natural tendency of all this is to render him industrious and persevering; so that keeping out of view the special blessing of God, and viewing him in this respect as on a level with other men—if it be true, as the wise man says, that *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*—religion is naturally favourable to the acquisition of wealth. Then wealth being acquired, other social distinctions follow in its train. The qualities by which success has been achieved will attract the respect of his neighbours, not of the mean and worthless things who pay deference to wealth however acquired, (we speak not of that, though he will receive it on account of his possessions, for that is no honour,) but of those who are capable of appreciating the good qualities of a man, who, by his unaided efforts, has attained to the possession of wealth and influence. Though the world may dislike his religion, the better part of it can appreciate the qualities of perseverance and integrity, and by these coupled with the success they have achieved he cannot fail to command respect.

Christianity conduces to the same result, by making him sensible of his relations and responsibilities. He cannot isolate himself, in feeling and in thought, as he was wont to do in his irreligious state. His religion has awakened the consciousness, that he is

related to other beings, to whom he is under obligation to perform the duties which that relation involves. It assures him that work is the lot of man—the law of the universe,—that to every man some task is allotted, the performance of which is essential to the welfare of others. The idler is a burden on the community, reaping the fruits of others' labour, while he refuses to labour for their welfare in return.

But there is an obligation still more imperative. God is the owner of his faculties, and has entrusted them to his keeping, that they might be diligently employed. His mental powers are the Lord's. The observation which perceives, the imagination which contrives, the directing mind and the conquering will, must all be exercised for God. If he has not the head to plan, but only the hand to execute, God gave him that hand. If he cannot even execute with skill, has he the meaner power of doing meaner work? He owes that power to God. No faculty has been given for misappropriation, or that it might be allowed to lie in disuse. Of the least important God says,—*Occupy till I come.* To wrap even the smallest in a napkin is to incur the displeasure, and expose ourselves to the condemnation of the Judge of all.

A frequent occasion of idleness, especially among the young, is their dislike for, and discontent with, the work which lies immediately before them. They

have a much higher conception of their capabilities than society has yet formed, if they may judge from the work which it has given them to do. Despising the humble employment to which they are now confined, and sighing idly after a higher sphere, they please themselves with the thought of the wonders they will achieve when their talents are properly appreciated. Splendid castles rise in the air before them. A bright halo surrounds the course which their imagination shapes. There is no limit to their purposed achievements. No standard is too high to measure their success. Meanwhile the intoxicating dream consumes the time which should be devoted to the duties of the hour; and even when that is past, the gorgeous cloud-land in which they have revelled renders all the more unattractive the homely toil to which they must needs return. And thus wasted hours and unaccomplished tasks hang darkly o'er the memory, as if in mockery or rebuke of their pleasing reveries.

To this idle dreaming we know of no antidote equal to religion. It teaches that your duty is determined not by your capabilities only, but also by your opportunities. You are not to remain idle until you obtain the kind of work for which you deem yourself most qualified. That which you have an opportunity of doing must be done. While holding yourself in

readiness to step into a higher sphere, should a higher sphere be found, you must diligently prosecute your present calling, however humble, contenting yourself with the thought, that, if qualified for it, the nobler work will come at the fitting time. The requirement of religion is,—*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.*

“Trust not the future, however pleasant;  
Let the dead past bury its dead :  
Act, act in the living present ;  
Heart within, and God o’erhead.”

Your spirit is chafed, perhaps, because of the lowly nature of the employment in which you are compelled to engage,—a young man of aspiring ambition, it may be, your pride is wounded because you deem your work so much inferior to your capabilities; but it may be questioned if you will mend the matter by spending your time in idleness, or impatiently hunting after some more important position. Is it not a dictate of religion, as well as of prudence, that you will best prove your fitness for higher employment by efficiently discharging the duties of your station? By all means better your position, if you can; but you are most likely to succeed in that by doing well your present work. However mean your employment may be—though it were that of the errand-boy or the shoe-black—you should be manly enough to do it well. You may stoop to conquer. If your

occupation will not reflect honour on you, you may, by honouring it, make it the stepping-stone to something higher. And, whether or not, it is not the nature of a man's work which does him credit, but the manner of its performance.

“ Honour and shame from no condition rise ;  
Act well your part—there all the honour lies.”

Religion teaches you that the lowly nature of your employment does not exempt you from responsibility. The man whose capabilities and opportunities are of the meanest order, is as truly responsible to God for them, as if he possessed those of an angel. He who can only sweep a crossing will be as certainly called to account for the manner in which he fulfils his mission, as he who can write a “Paradise Lost.” The peasant who tills the ground, as well as the framer of a nation's laws, will be rewarded according to his works. Though not required with one talent to do the work of ten, we shall be condemned if we neglect to exercise the one. God will judge us all by the use we have made of what we have received, and, however mean our capabilities and opportunities, if we have not performed our allotted task we shall not be found blameless.

When this is considered, it produces earnestness of purpose. You go forth to your work with a feeling to which others are strangers—the feeling that you

are fulfilling your mission, and will be rewarded with the approval of the Judge. Having respect to a higher recompence than your pecuniary remuneration, feeling that you serve a Master who is greater than man—a Master who, for wise purposes, has placed you where you are, you will engage in your work, not with slave-like reluctance, but with the cheerfulness and alacrity of the man who contends for a prize. *Fervent in spirit, you will be diligent in business, serving the Lord.*

Had our limits permitted, we might have shewn that facts accord with the view we have taken of the natural tendency of religion, by pointing you to the manner in which it has promoted the social elevation of various heathen tribes, among which it has been propagated by our missionaries—to the transformation which it has effected in the character and condition of some of the most abandoned and wretched of our own population—and to those who, commencing life without any superior advantages, have, owing to the influence of religion on the character, outstripped all their companions in their progress toward wealth and station. But, as our space does not admit of such reference, we must leave you to pursue this train of thought for yourself, and content ourselves with the remark, that perhaps the small proportion of working men in our churches, of which so many now complain,

is to be accounted for in some degree by the fact that many who enter the church as working men, soon cease to be so in consequence of the elevating influence of religion. Seeing that a large proportion of the working classes are among those who do enter, we are persuaded that the result would surprise many, and render most evident the favourable influence of Christianity on the temporal condition of its subjects, were the inquiry instituted—WHAT PER-CENTAGE OF WORKING MEN ARE ENABLED THROUGH CHRISTIANITY TO RISE ABOVE THEIR ORIGINAL POSITION?

But this is not all. Christianity not only conduces to social elevation, by its influence on the individual; owing to the nature of its doctrines, its diffusion throughout society tends to the same result. There may be false professions of Christianity, where the lower classes are oppressed and down-trodden; but wherever it gains the mastery, it must excite that regard for the poorest members of the community, which issues in philanthropic efforts for the improvement of their condition, and in the adoption of those social arrangements on which their welfare depends.

We should expect this from its assertion of the equality and brotherhood of man. By proclaiming the truth that *God hath made of one blood all nations of men*, it cautions men against the oppression or

degradation of any of their species. No man, however mean his circumstances, or low his station, or contemptible his talents, is to be trampled on by his powerful, or wealthy, or haughty neighbour; for they have sprung from the same source, and were formed by the same hand. The degraded serf may claim brotherhood with his lordly master. The rude barbarian may say to the refined courtier, "Thou art bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." The learned and the illiterate are partakers of the same nature; and the lowest may claim from, as he is bound to render to, the highest, the sympathy and treatment of a brother.

The doctrine of the incarnation has the same tendency. The fact of God taking upon himself our nature, invests the meanest creature who wears it with a dignity which cannot fail to command the respect of all by whom it is recognised. The poorest man or girl in our factories—the wretch whom intemperance has robbed of her all, who sits at the corner of your streets shivering in rags and filth, without a home to shelter her or a friend to take her by the hand—the slave, with his fettered limbs, the brand on his cheek, his flesh quivering beneath the taskmaster's lash;—these are not to be despised or unjustly treated—they are not mere tools to be worn out and thrown away—machines out of whom men may wring so much labour. Are they not linked by the ties of nature

to Him who now sits on the throne of the universe, possessed of all power in heaven and in earth? Has he not assumed their nature, and shed his blood in their behalf? And does he not condescend to call the meanest of them "brother?"

Nor is it otherwise with the doctrine of immortality. Christianity regards man as the possessor of an immortal soul—a vital spark which shall outlive the decay of the body, if not the dissolution of all material things. Where this is believed, the meanest of men necessarily rises from his insignificance, and, instead of being regarded as a mere instrument for the promotion of covetous or ambitious schemes, we think of him as a being to whose highest interests we might, with propriety, devote the most valuable of our earthly possessions. He is a man, shall we say, of low station, of vulgar habits, of limited knowledge and indifferent character; perhaps, in addition to all this, he belongs to a despised race—has a woolly head and a dark skin, and what you call a brutal expression of countenance;—we must respect him notwithstanding. Is it not enough to secure for him our considerate treatment, that he shall live when the world, with all its works, has been consumed—when the sun has been blotted out and the stars have been swept from the heavens—and that even then he shall feel nothing of the decrepitude of age, but, strong in immortal

youth, will be capable of pressing on to new and further-reaching investigation into the infinite works of God?

But, perhaps, there is no part of Christianity which is more fitted to diffuse throughout society a respect for the lower classes than the Saviour's assumption of poverty during his earthly life. When the rich of his own nation would have been proud to be selected as the relatives and companions of their expected Messiah, he descended to the extreme of poverty—*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*. Thus did he render honourable both poverty and toil. If a great man, by wearing it himself, can render any dress becoming, and cause it to be copied by others, no Christian need be ashamed of the rank which his Master assumed. And however it may be with a world which receives him not, in the churches which are called by his name—unless they prove forgetful of their origin, recreant to their profession, treacherous to the claims of their Lord, a disgrace to the name they bear—unless they are guilty of the most flagrant ingratitude—the poor and the toiling classes of the community will ever be had in honourable estimation.

We are thus careful to lay before you the teaching of Christianity, in order that your estimate of it may rest on its own merits, and not on the lives of its

professors, by whom it is sometimes dishonoured. Not that we shrink from an appeal to facts. The uppermost question in your minds, in all probability, is, How has Christianity affected the condition of the lower classes in our own land, where it has had the ascendancy for so long? And we feel assured that a candid examination of our social state will amply corroborate the foregoing remarks. Our Secularist friends propose the rejection of Christianity, on the ground that it presents a hindrance to the welfare and social progress of the people; and, in proof of their assertion, point to professing Christians who are opposed to the people's claims, and to the existence of social evils which press heavily on the poor. Now, we admit that there are professing Christians who are hostile to the people's rights; but what does the admission prove? Only that men may profess Christianity who are not actuated by its spirit. We admit, too, that social arrangements exist by which the poor are painfully affected; but neither does this admission prove anything, except that Christianity, in its attempts to improve the condition of the people, has to contend with human depravity, and that its work, in consequence, is but partially accomplished. Instead of attributing to Christianity the evils which exist, and then pronouncing it the enemy of the people, candour would suggest the inquiry, what is it doing for the removal

of those evils as compared with what is being done in other lands where Christianity is unknown? Let such an inquiry be made, and the result will be more than sufficient to refute the pretensions of Secularism. Go to Pagan nations, and you find the toiling classes not only without political rights, but without personal liberty—mere slaves, such as they were in our own country until Christianity broke their chains and made them men—without more than the barest necessities of life, and but scantily supplied with these, uncared for by their social superiors, who make no attempt to improve their condition. Then look at our own country, and you will see Christianity removing the barriers which separate class from class—teaching the rich to feel for the poor, while it teaches the poor to respect the rich, and both classes that they are mutually serviceable—improving the relation between employers and workmen, and leading them to sympathise with each other—building hospitals for the relief of the diseased, and places of refuge for the destitute—contriving to provide useful instruction and healthful recreation for every class—shortening the hours of labour that all may have an opportunity of gazing on the beauties of nature, or enjoying the comforts of home, or improving their mental powers—and, in a word, raising, or having already raised, our country to a degree of social elevation previously unknown in

the history of human things. We seek for figures to describe its progress and its influence; and we think of an angel of light shedding ambrosial fragrance from his wings, and scattering the blessings of heaven on a cursed and restless world; or we think of the Divine Spirit who of old brooded over the chaotic waste, bringing order out of confusion, harmony out of discord, light out of darkness, and life out of death, for such is the influence which Christianity exerts on the weltering chaos of human passions. Reject it, as Secularists persuade you, and you do not rid yourselves, as they say, of an obstacle to your progress, but you spurn the only guardian of your rights—that which has rendered your social condition what it is, and affords the only guarantee for its improvement in time to come.

## CHAPTER VI.

*How Christianity promises to reward you.*

CHRISTIANITY has its rewards as well as its duties. If it has work for us to do, it has also wages to bestow. If it requires us to make sacrifices and to deny ourselves, it amply compensates for our loss. Its influence on the mind during the present life is more than an equivalent for any outward good of which it deprives us, and more than counterbalances any external troubles to which we are exposed. But it is in the future life that we are to expect its most glorious results. It points us from the present to the future. That we may perform duty and endure trial here, it holds out to us the prospect of glory hereafter. We know not its worth unless we look to the unseen and eternal world. Here indeed we enjoy some of its fruits, but there we must look for the full reward. All that we enjoy now is but the earnest of coming good—valuable chiefly because of that to which it

points—delusive but for that. It is the sure hope of future glory that renders present trials light, and supports under present sorrows. The part we act, notwithstanding the inconvenience which attends it, is wise, because of the results in which it issues. We see reason to perform present duties, however difficult, and to make the sacrifices which Christianity requires, however painful, when it teaches us to have *respect to the recompense of reward*.

We have had occasion, more than once, to allude to this subject; but it is too important to be disposed of in a brief allusion. It merits, and will well repay, more lengthened consideration than is possible within the limits of a discourse. And our wish is, though we cannot exhaust the subject, nor yet present it in outline, to lay before you such descriptions of a few of its leading features, as may assist in persuading you to embrace Christianity, by awakening in you a desire for the reward which it promises to bestow.

When we speak of reward, and of how Christianity promises to reward its subjects, we do not mean to convey the impression that the future enjoyment of believers is strictly in accordance with their merits, each one receiving precisely what he deserves and can justly claim; for we deem such an impression at variance both with the statements of Scripture and the expe-

rience of believers. The Scriptures teach, and every Christian is constrained to acknowledge, that, while the punishment of the wicked is the desert of their sin, the reward of the righteous is the gift of grace. Thus when Paul says, *The wages of sin is death*, he does not add, *The wages of righteousness is life*, but *The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*. He attributes the one to justice—the other to grace. Justice appoints the punishment of the lost; grace bestows the reward of the saved. Nor is it to be understood as attributable to grace, only inasmuch as grace commences and continues the work which qualifies men for heaven, but because grace ultimately secures its enjoyment. The grace of God is illustriously displayed in every step of the Christian's progress from the commencement of the Divine life in the soul to its consummation in the celestial state. He is indebted to grace for his final triumph over death, as much as for his first deliverance from its fear. It is owing to the exercise of grace that the emancipated spirit soars on high. By grace the body is raised from the dust of the grave, clothed with immortality, fashioned like unto the glorified body of Christ. Grace conducts him through the gates into the city, clothes him with the white robe, ministers at his coronation, puts him in possession of all the immunities and privileges of the heavenly state. The song

of the glorified is not, Worthy are we, but *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Grace provides the only way through which we can enter heaven, presents the only ground on which heaven can be enjoyed. Having once sinned, we never can merit such a reward. There would be no heaven for us were there no grace; and should grace ever cease to be exercised, the heaven that is would cease to be. Nothing but grace assures its inhabitants of its continuance; and the knowledge that they are all of grace enhances all its joys.

But while we say this much to caution you against the supposition that you will merit heaven in case of your becoming religious, we have nevertheless good reason for speaking of heaven as the *reward* which Christianity promises to those who comply with its demands. Although it is the gift of grace, it is also the reward of obedience, for to the obedient its enjoyment is confined. It is never conferred on the impenitent, but on those who exercise faith in Christ, and are submissive to the Divine will. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Into the holy city nothing shall enter that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie. God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and*

*immortality, eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.*

Again, we may call it the *reward* of Christianity, because it is the means by which the Divine Being expresses his approbation of the Christian character. As the punishment of the wicked is the expression of God's abhorrence of sin, so the bliss of the Christian is the expression of his approval of righteousness. He intimates his approval of the faithful servant when he says, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant*; he confers the tokens and results of his approval when he says, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. And although these results are not merited, and consequently not enjoyed as the reward of justice, they may be called a reward, just as a distinguished favour conferred in token of approval by a parent on an obedient child—albeit the child has no claim to it—may be called the reward of that child's obedience.

Once more, heaven may be called the *reward* of Christianity, inasmuch as the nature and amount of its enjoyments are determined by the services rendered. The measure of the Christian's happiness in the future world will be in proportion to the degree of his devotedness in this. God will reward every man according to, or after the measure of his works. He whose services are few and comparatively unimportant,

will not receive such an abundant reward as the man who, possessing the same abilities and opportunities, has been fruitful in every good word and work. One star differeth from another star in glory. In our Father's house there are vessels of silver as well as vessels of gold; and even the golden vessels differ in size and in the amount they contain. Although we enter heaven by grace, grace will not confer the same enjoyment on the indolent and the active. Our actions will determine the measure of our future happiness as much as though they formed its price; and, accordingly, though unmerited by them, it properly constitutes their reward.

Having thus briefly pointed out the principles on which the reward of Christianity is conferred, for the purpose of guarding you against any misconception of the value of such services as you may be able to render, we proceed to what is properly the object of this chapter, that is, to shew in what the reward of Christianity consists. And, taking the lowest part of the reward first, as that which irreligious men can best understand, and are most capable of appreciating, we remark, that *Christianity holds out the prospect of admission into a glorious locality.*

There are some who speak of heaven as a state; and they are right so far. It is a state as well as a

place. A certain state of mind is necessary to its enjoyment. Its highest happiness is derived from the character of its inhabitants. They altogether mistake its nature, who conceive of it merely as a place of material splendour and magnificence, whose soil yields delicious fruits, where they shall be regaled with music, exempt from pain, surrounded with everything which can gratify the senses, and for the enjoyment of which no moral qualification is required. Within the bounds of God's universe there is no such heaven as that—no paradise for men who have degenerated into brutes, and wish for nothing better than, without annoyance, to eat, and drink, and sleep. If it do not embrace the perfection of your own character, your hope of heaven is an idle and idiotic dream.

But while heaven is unquestionably a state, it is not to be thought of as a state only. The heaven of which I read in Scripture is a glorious locality as well as a holy state. I read of a *kingdom which cannot be moved—of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away—of a better country, that is, an heavenly—of a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God ; whose streets are pure gold, like unto transparent glass ; whose gates are pearls ; whose walls jasper ; whose foundations precious stones ; into which the glory and honour of the nations are brought, in which they have no need of the sun, neither*

*of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* I read of *new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* I read, too, of the resurrection bodies of the righteous dead, with the transformed bodies of the righteous who are alive at the Saviour's coming, being *caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, that so they may be ever with the Lord.* And though I may be told that much of this language is figurative, I do not think that that assertion is sufficient to remove from it the idea of a glorious locality. If we are to be together, and with the Saviour, it must be in some locality. Our resurrection bodies, though spiritual, are still bodies, and must inhabit some material structure. And surely the language we have cited, whether it be figurative or literal, will justify the conclusion, that that structure will be one of surpassing splendour.

The Scriptures contain nothing which professes to be an accurate description of the materialism of heaven, chiefly, I apprehend, because its grandeur is such that no description of it can be rendered intelligible to our comprehension. And, of course, having no description of it in the Bible, we cannot profess to say what it is. All that we can do is to struggle towards a conception of it by the assistance of the most beautiful and magnificent objects which are witnessed here.

From what we see, we may try to conceive of that which is unseen. But after we have done our best, our conceptions must come far short of the glorious reality. I have sometimes pleased myself with this exercise, and have had such thoughts of the grandeur of heaven as were well-nigh overwhelming. I have gazed on the slumbering ocean, when like a mirror it reflected the crimson or the dappled sky. I have stood on a hill-side of a summer evening, watching the sun descend behind a mass of clouds, the upper part of which was bathed in a flood of golden light, and those clouds seemed the continuance of a mountain which rose gradually from the east and terminated in a bold promontory westward, so that the mountain appeared like the pathway to glory, and that blaze of brilliancy o'er its summit like the celestial gate, while the dark masses that rose on either hand, slightly tinged with the departing light, might have been taken for the battlements of the city of God. And I have looked on the lovely landscape, the smiling corn fields and the rich green pasture, and the woodland, and the rushing stream, and the lake with its clusters of islands, studding its surface like "lovely gems upon a silver sea;" while over all was bent the azure sky, chequered by fleecy clouds which enhanced the beauty they partially concealed, and fragrant odours were wafted on the evening air, and the

birds rendered vocal the surrounding groves,—a very paradise of sweets it seemed. And I have thought of those mountains covered with perpetual snow, which stand like hoary giants defying the wasting influence of time, with the limpid waters at their base, surrounded with a margin of flowers and verdure, thus combining beauty with grandeur, the loveliness which wins, with the majesty which awes the soul. And thus have I attempted to rise to a conception of the greater glory of heaven, and wondered, when earth was so beautiful, what that must be. For oh! I know that there are forms of grandeur there, and gems of beauty there, and a brilliancy of glory there, such as earth does not contain.

Do you ask me how I know this? I know it because the heirs of heaven will be welcome to the most magnificent parts of God's creation, and these surpass not only everything which the eye hath seen, but everything which the poet's pen has described, or the poet's imagination conceived. For surely God can execute what his creatures can think. What are their highest thoughts but shadows of the reality which he has produced? Think you that his creative power has reached its climax in this little ball of earth? And if he here spreads such loveliness around those who are rebels against himself, what entertainment may he be expected to provide for his chosen

ones, on whom he delights to lavish the tokens of his love? With what unthought-of beauty and splendour will he adorn their future home! "Cannot he create another world many times more fair than this? and cast over it a mantle of light many times more lovely? and wash it with purer dews than ever dropped from the eyelids of the morning? Can he not shut up Winter in his hoary caverns, or send him howling over another domain? . . . Who knows in what new graces he may clothe nature, with such various enchantment of hill and dale, woodland, rushing stream and living fountain; with bowers of bliss and Sabbath scenes of peace, peopled by a thousand forms of disporting creatures:—so as to make all which the world hath beheld seem like the gross picture with which you catch infants; all which the most rapt imagination of Eastern poets hath conceived seem like the ignorant prattle and rude structures which first delight our childhood and afterwards ashame our riper years?"\* And what more do we need to justify this conception of heaven, than that an All-wise Architect plans it, and an All-powerful Hand constructs it, and that it is furnished from an inexhaustible source, and by One who is too good to withhold anything which will gratify the objects of his love?

We ought in honesty to say, that some Christians

\* Irving.

object to this view of heaven as too carnal in its nature, and unworthy of the lofty spirituality which, they think, will characterise the heavenly state. We need not reply to this objection, that the Bible justifies the conception of heaven which we have formed; we can shew that the objection is based on a false assumption. It is not the case that there is anything inimical to, or inconsistent with, the loftiest spirituality in splendid materialism. The most that can be said is, that material objects are to the mind, in this respect, very much what the mind makes them. They tend to foster the state of mind with which they are surveyed. Cæsar Malan kneels down to worship, and Simeon thinks of his superior possessions in heaven, and Chalmers of the aspects of physical beauty which are there, while gazing on the same scene which leads the worldling only to think of how he may gratify his love of pleasure. And when I know how different men, in the same objects, find something to strengthen the tendency of their own thoughts, I can see no force in the objection, that a material heaven is inconsistent with the spirituality by which it is characterised. When surveyed with a spiritual mind, all its objects will foster spirituality. The devotional frame which distinguishes that higher state will find nourishment in every surrounding scene. Even here, where devotion is so imperfect, it is strengthened by the wisdom, and power, and goodness, which nature exhibits.

If we have but a spark of spiritual life, we know that impure feelings are not cherished as we survey God's glorious works, but that all grossness, and littleness, and selfishness, then seem inconsistent with the scene; and the soul shakes herself free from the petty cares and vexations of life, and soars on wings of devotion toward the throne of the Eternal. Sometimes when I have gazed on a secluded valley in a mountain region, when the sun was pouring into it a flood of splendour, and the calm of a Sabbath morning prevailed, and the natural beauty of the scene was enough to make one fancy that it had escaped the primal curse, or retained, at least, some trace of Eden's loveliness, I have thought, surely they must be holy men and women who dwell here—forgetting for the moment that to the darkened eye all things are dark, and that the seared heart is insensible to nature's most potent charms. When I have seen the cloud floating in the splendour of a summer sun-set, I have likened it to an angel's chariot, and have sought to fit myself for intercourse with the holy ones who inhabit the spirit-land. When in the cloudy day the sun's rays, streaming through some narrow opening, have formed a visible pillar of light, I have been reminded of the ladder which rose above the patriarch in his dream, on which angels ascended and descended, and have prayed that there might always be such

communication between my soul and heaven. When I see the trees on the hill-side, with their tapering tops standing out against the clear blue sky, they appear to me fingers of nature pointing to God, and inviting men to worship and adore. The mountain reminds me, as I walk in its shadow, of the littleness of man, and appears to me a monument of nature, testifying that there is a God, for none but God could rear a structure so sublime. It is in such moments that I can best see the beauty, and drink into the spirit, of those glorious lines of the poet :—

“ Ye ice falls ! ye that from the mountain's brow,  
Adown enormous ravines slope amain—  
Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice,  
And stopp'd at once amidst their maddest plunge !  
Motionless torrents ! silent cataracts !  
Who made you glorious as the gates of heaven  
Beneath the keen full moon ? Who bade the sun  
Clothe you with rainbows ? Who, with living flowers  
Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet ?  
God ! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,  
Answer ! and let the ice-plains echo, God !  
God ! sing, ye meadow streams, with gladsome voice !  
Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds !  
And they, too, have a voice, yon piles of snow,  
And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God ! ”

And, oh ! if in this world there be scenes so fitted to inspire devotion, what will that world be which God prepares for the habitation of his redeemed and glorified ones ! May it not be a temple as well as a palace— a grand cathedral in which devotion is embodied,

every scene and every sound of which will bear the soul on high, and reflecting in all its parts the image of its great Creator !

I have dwelt at—what some would think undue—length on this part of the subject, because of my anxiety that the reader should form such a conception of heaven as I have endeavoured to present. I am convinced that its influence on many minds is greatly obstructed by the too ethereal representations of it which are frequently given ; and most anxious am I that men should think of it as something real and substantial—not a vague, shadowy, dream-like something, existing in some ethereal region, its various objects so rarified and undefined, that the mind cannot grasp them, but something which may both be seen and felt, akin and yet superior to our present habitation. We may speak of it as an eternal Sabbath, as a ceaseless worship, as vocal with everlasting praise, but though these features will render it most attractive to holy minds, we know too well that they have no attractions for others. But when we can speak of it as a place of material splendour, as a glorious locality, as replete with every thing which can gratify the tastes of sentient beings—when we can tell them that they may inherit that magnificence, and that all the beautiful objects which are there may minister to their enjoyment—that they may wander on its delecta-

ble mountains and roam through its flowery plains, inhale its balmy atmosphere and rejoice under its cloudless sky—when we can tell them all this, we may reasonably hope that the information will awaken in them some desire for its enjoyment, and that, desiring this, they may also be led to contemplate and to make preparation for the higher and better part of the Christian's reward.

This leads me to remark again, that *Christianity holds out to its subjects the prospect of perfect happiness*. The heavenly state, as described in Scripture, is one in which none of the elements of happiness are wanting. The glimpses given of it there, obscure and partial as they necessarily are, convey the idea of perfect rapture.

One thing which contributes to this happiness is the fact that the faculties of its inhabitants are in harmony with the grandeur of their home. "I cannot think of heaven otherwise than as the perfection of every good thing which my mind conceiveth, the fulfilment of every pious purpose, the gratification of every devout wish, and the perfection of this, unfinished creature which I feel myself to be. I hope this body will not faint as now it doth, and languish, and stop short of the energetic purposes of the mind; I hope that the instruments of thought within the

brain will not grow numb and refuse obedience to the will; and that the fountain of feeling within the heart will not subside and dry up when called upon too much. I hope that time will open its narrow gates, and admit a thousand acts and processes which now it strangleth in the narrowness of its porch: and I would fain add the wings of the morning, that I might travel with the speed of thought to the seat of my affections, and gratify them without restraint. And, oh! I hope that in heaven the instability of virtue will be removed, and that there will be no more commonplace talk about the golden mean; but that the heart may drink deep and not be intoxicated with its affections, the head think on and not be wearied with its cogitations."\* Nay, more, *I know* that all this will be. The Bible warrants me to say that the mind will conceive with greater rapidity and accuracy and beauty, and the lips give more eloquent utterance to the thought; that the head will never ache because of the overwrought brain, nor the mind, wayward or sluggish, refuse the bidding of the will; that the eye will never smart or become dim as it pores over the instructive page, and that the arm will never feel weary. Knowledge will be acquired with greater facility than now, not through signs which partially obscure the truths they are intended to con-

\* Irving.

vey, but the mind without intervening media will penetrate into the truth of things. Our powers of transition will be greater, and far more intimate our intercourse with others. The ability to execute will suffice for the accomplishment of our conceptions; our projects will reach maturity, and all our faculties exist in a state of perfection now unknown.

The labourer longs for rest. If you, my reader, are one of those whose lot it is to work for their daily bread, you know better than most men how refreshing is repose after toil. And perhaps there is no representation of heaven which will give you a better conception of its happiness, than those in which it is described as a state of rest. It is the perfection of that *rest which remaineth for the people of God*. What a picture of repose it presents, with its glassy sea, its green pastures, and still waters; its serene sky never darkened by tempest, across which floats no threatening cloud; from which their sun ceases not to pour forth the rays of its high eternal noon! There is rest not only from toil, but from pain—from internal conflicts—from the turbulence of passion—from the assaults of spiritual foes—from struggles against evil tendencies—from the disappointment of cherished hopes—from the craving of unsatisfied desire. Sin cannot enter that land. It is secure from the invasion of foes. There is nothing to excite a pang either

mental or physical. There is no cause of annoyance either within or around them. The angel which John saw in vision describes them as having no unsatisfied desire, and as enjoying perfect repose, when he says, *These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

But even a state of rest does not give you the idea of perfect happiness. You become tired of rest sometimes. Repose if long continued, becomes monotonous and wearisome. Besides, the exercise of your faculties yields you pleasure. They are sources of pleasure only when they are exercised. So that there must be activity combined with repose ere your happiness can be complete. Now it is a peculiarity of the rest of heaven, that it consists with the vigorous and harmonious exercise of the various faculties of our nature. We think of rest here as connected with a state of inaction; but there we shall enjoy the sensation of repose

combined with the sensation of activity—the feeling of perfect rest with the constant and pleasurable exercise of all our powers. Though we rest, our faculties will not lie in disuse. They will find scope and call for exercise in investigating the works of God, in intercourse with exalted companions, in performing the Divine will and adoring the Divine perfections. It is impossible that they can remain idle while a universe all but boundless invites our study. To inquire into the nature and history of those myriads of worlds that people the realms of space—to find in these new illustrations of, and new cause to adore, the Divine perfections—to meditate on the revelations of his perfections which mark the epochs of eternity—will afford eternal exercise for our ever-expanding and ever-strengthening powers. With such employment as this, there can be no idleness there. In all my conceptions of heaven, it appears to me a place of ceaseless, harmonious, happy activity, where the good prosecute, amid far superior advantages, the work which was so much retarded and so frequently interrupted here. I think of Newton, *e. g.*, as continuing his inquiries into the laws of nature, commenced while on earth, from the lofty vantage-ground which he now occupies, and with the clearer light which he now enjoys. The genius of Milton which here clothed itself in such gorgeous forms, and uttered itself in such harmonious numbers,

in my estimation is not idle now. I conceive of him as vindicating the ways of God, which he now better understands, to audience fit though not few. I hear Chalmers telling others how his most glowing conceptions have been realised, and how far more illustriously than he supposed, creation renders tribute to the Cross. I think of Paul as discoursing on his favourite theme, describing its influence on *principalities and powers in heavenly places*, and unfolding new depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. I think of the redeemed as passing from world to world with the swiftness of thought, with minds ever expanding and powers ever maturing, ever adding to their stores of knowledge, ever deepening their reverence for the Divine perfections, and ever augmenting their joy. And from this ceaseless activity combined with the sensation of undisturbed repose, do I form a most pleasing conception of the happiness of heaven.

The only other thing which I speak of as contributing to render the happiness of heaven perfect, is fellowship with the great and good. I do not know that this will appear very attractive to some minds; I fear a certain amount of religion is necessary to its proper appreciation; yet it were improper to pass it by without notice. We know how much we are improved by such fellowship here—how the greatness of

our companions makes us ashamed of our littleness, their nobleness of our meanness, their generosity of our selfishness, and their wisdom of our folly—how on looking at them while we become dissatisfied with ourselves, we aspire to resemble them, and, aided by their counsel, and example, and influence, gradually approximate to their elevation. In the Persian fable, the odoriferous earth is represented as saying, “I am but a piece of clay, but I was placed beside the rose and I partook of its fragrance;” and so the ordinary clay of humanity, when brought into contact with the wise and good, receives, in some degree, the fragrance of their character.

Now, when this principle is recognised, what a prospect of mental and moral improvement is opened to the Christian, in connexion with the fellowship to be enjoyed in heaven! How will they lead us on to higher degrees of holiness who have long enjoyed the progressive perfection of heaven! And what accessions shall we receive to our stores of knowledge from intercourse with those mighty minds who, after attaining to such gigantic stature on earth, have had their mental growth so much accelerated by the more favourable influences of the celestial world. And how delightful and profitable will it be to renew our intercourse with those loved and holy ones whom we have known in the flesh, whose character was so pure that it seemed

as if heaven had set its seal upon them, and we fancied them too good for earth, whom in accordance with our fears, prematurely as we thought, yet at the best time, because the time which he saw meet, God took to be with himself. Nor are these the only inhabitants of heaven. The angelic beings who ministered to us here, will, on our arrival there, make their former wards acquainted with their new home, and lead us into the higher walks of knowledge and enjoyment which are found in heaven. And there is a higher fellowship still. We shall enjoy the high privilege of intercourse with Him *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. We shall see His face and hear His voice, who is the object of adoration to all the heavenly hosts, on whom all eyes are fixed, around whom all affections cluster, whose praise is on every tongue, at whose feet they cast their crowns. We shall see Him. In the society and under the tuition of such exalted beings, we have the prospect of entering on a march of endless improvement, in which we shall explore the numberless worlds which God has made, increase our acquaintance with the attributes of God, become assimilated to him in character, draw nearer to him, enter into the blessedness of his nature, lose ourselves in him, until with cherubim and seraphim we sing—

“ God ! God ! God !  
Thou fill’st our eyes  
As were the skies

One burning boundless sun ;  
While creature mind  
In path confined  
Passeth a spot thereon,  
God ! God ! God !”

Here we must stop. The subject has reached its climax. It were impossible to go further, however desirable it might seem. Enough has been said to convince those who are capable of understanding it, that the happiness of heaven is perfect. And we have only to add, that this perfect happiness is eternal in its duration. It is interesting to notice the care which the Bible has taken to make plain and prominent this truth. It assures us of it in the plainest language which can possibly be employed. *I give unto them eternal life, says the Saviour, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* And as if the idea were too vast for words fitly to present it to the mind, the strongest figures and comparisons are made to secure this purpose. Christ is the vine; believers the branches. He is the head; they the members of his body. Not only is he the source of their life; but, according to these figures, his life and theirs are one; and theirs, in consequence, must run parallel with his. As there can be no termination of his existence, so their being and happiness can never terminate, who are identified with him—whose *life is hid with Christ in God.* But strong as

is the assurance thus afforded, that they shall never perish, it becomes stronger still when He who is called *the life, the Prince of life, he who liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore, he who is from everlasting to everlasting, he who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*, addressing believers says, *Because I live, ye shall live also*, thereby teaching us that He shall die before they shall cease to be, or cease to be *happy*. He measures the duration of their happiness by the duration of his own life; and no stronger assurance of eternal happiness could be given, for the life of Christ is IMMORTALITY.

And now, dear reader, having thus endeavoured to make you acquainted with the hope which animates the Christian, or, in other words, with the reward which Christianity promises to bestow on those who comply with its claims, permit me to ask, what think you of that hope? Is not the prospect of obtaining such a reward enough to fire your ambition? Can you doubt the happiness of the men who are expecting such a termination to their earthly life? Is not their condition far superior to your own? Although Christianity were to prove untrue, and the things which they hope for should never be realised, their state after death would not be worse than yours. And meanwhile that hope is the solace

of their life, nerving them for its duties, and supporting under its trials, smoothing its most rugged paths, tempering the fiercest storms, brightening the darkest day. Under the troubles which are common to all, that hope affords them a consolation which you know not. From the anxieties which perplex men, it opens to the soul a haven of refuge which you cannot enter. When calamity presses heavily upon them, when sorrow enters the soul, as with a gentle hand, whose soothing touch you cannot feel, it binds their broken heart. All this it does for them in this life; and hence, though you keep out of view the future, the advantage is all on their side. And if Christianity be true, as every Christian knows it is—if this hope be well founded, as every Christian feels it is—if the glory which they anticipate be no dream but a blessed reality, as every Christian is assured—oh! how great is the loss which you sustain—how unspeakable the good of which you deprive yourself, when, for the sake of the world's wealth, or honour, or pleasures, you turn away from the message, and refuse compliance with the claims of Christianity! What is all your earthly gain when compared with such a loss? *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

I have done. The task I proposed for myself is now accomplished—how imperfectly none can feel more than I. May I hope, that with all its imperfections it will not be without its use. My object has not been to prove the truth of Christianity; but to remove your prejudices by shewing, that it is not, as you suppose, hostile to your interests. I have no fear for the issue if you are only persuaded to give to Christianity your candid consideration. The infidelity—the irreligiousness of many of your class, is caused by an unreasoning aversion to Christianity, and not by an intelligent conviction that Christianity is untrue. The misrepresentations of its adversaries, or your own misconceptions, have led you to regard it with hatred; and my object has been to correct these by exhibiting Christianity as it is. For this purpose I have shewn you what Christianity requires you to believe, what it requires you to do, what it says you are, what it proposes to make you, what influence it will exert on your earthly life, and how it promises to reward you in a future state of being. On these subjects I have not said all that might have been said, nor all that I could have said had time permitted; but I have grievously failed if I have not said enough for my purpose. As it is, I leave the representation with you, content that it should be taken for what it is worth. My appeal is not to your kindness, but to

your candour. In parting with you, I have no favour to ask, and no wish to express, except one, which I may present in the words of the greatest champion of Christianity—words which claim all that its ablest advocates can wish, and not more than the weakest should receive—I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN ; JUDGE YE WHAT I SAY.

THE END.



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